Erica Jong, Katie Roiphe & Naomi Wolf Talk Shop

Lilith

the independent Jewish women's magazine

How Museums Invent Us

Israel After 50: Half a Century. But Only Half the Story?

Right-Wing Women Struggle to Keep Orthodoxy Safe from Feminists

Vol. 23, No. 4
5758-5759 $4.50

PROCESSED
GTU LIBRARY

The Rosenthal Collection *Presents*

Stands 11" tall, 16" wide

Last year's 500 piece limited edition menorah designed by Yuri Koretsky sold out quickly! Don't miss the opportunity to order this year's design featuring brand new glass created especially for Hanukkah. Tiny 14K gold dreidels appear throughout the fused glass in a mix of transparency and brilliant color. Each of the 1800 pieces is individually signed and numbered and comes with an artist's bio.

The 1998 Issue of Our Most Popular Menorah Featuring BRAND NEW Festive Fused Glass

Available at these fine galleries or call 1-800-962-1545 to locate the gallery nearest you

Beth Yeshurun Houston, TX **Gallery III** Fort Lauderdale, FL **Stowe Craft Gallery** Stowe, VT
Halcyon Provincetown, MA **Gallery Judaica** Los Angeles, CA **Trio Israeli** Highland Park, NY
Priceless Possessions Paramus, NJ **Craft Co. #6** Rochester, NY **Wise Temple** Cincinatti, OH
Unique Accents Northbrook, IL **Shalom House** Woodland Hills, CA **Hamakor Gallery** Skokie, IL
Arthur Feldman Gallery Highland Park, IL **Dor L'Dor** San Diego, CA **Mindy's Place** Newtown, PA
Jumble China Huntington Station, NY **Beth Shalom** Elkins Park, PA **Mah-tov Gallery** Cherry Hill, NJ
Pink Adobe Tucson, AZ **Ziontalis** New York, NY **Choices** Sudbury, MA **Bala Judaica** Bala Cynwyd, PA
New Morning Asheville, NC **Golden Dreidle** Costa Mesa, CA **Chosen Gift and Bookstore** Miami, FL
Brochins Book & Gift Minneapolis, MN **Rosenblums** Chicago, IL **Skirball Cultural Center** Los Angeles, CA
Gifts from the Heart Marietta, GA **Kolbo** Brookline, MA **Off the Wall** Pepper Pike, OH **Afikomen** Berkley, CA

The Rosenthal Collection, Inc. 4210 Howard Avenue Kensington, Maryland 20895 301-493-5577 FAX 301-493-5577
Visit our website at rosenthalcollection.com

Lilith

Volume 23, No. 4 Winter 1998-99

2 **From the Editor**

3 **Kol Ishah**
News of Jewish women all over the world

Erica Jong, Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe talk shop • Lilith gets an image-lift • Edith Stein: Jewish woman becomes Catholic saint • In memory of Dr. Slepian • Long skirts, young women—a surprising new pitch for modesty

7 **Letters**

8 **Right-Wing Women Struggle to Protect Orthodoxy from Feminists**
by Sarah Blustain

While "Modern Orthodox" women seek a harmony between Judaism and feminism, sisters to their right are digging in, sponsoring lectures and classes to draw women (even high-powered careerists) back to home and hearth.

16 **Israel at 51**
by Naomi Danis

In half a century, have we heard only half the story? Now you can read about the *women*—and their projects—you saw nothing about in all the other media coverage of Israel's anniversary.

24 **An Open Letter to Buddhist Jews**
by Michele Kriegman

With an ex-husband and extended family who are REAL Buddhists, our author thinks Jews may be worshipping the Buddha for the wrong reasons.

8

26

16

26 **How Museums Invent Us**
by Carolyn Feibel

Your great-aunt's soup pot in a museum? Priceless artifacts in your attic? Introducing the new wave of feminist curators, who've fought to have shoes, cookbooks and miscellaneous *tchochkes*-cum-folk art included in the exhibited history of the Jews.

31 **Objects of Desire**
by Carol Bergman

A daughter's haunting account of her father's obsession—the naked, strangely mutilated children of painter Egon Schiele. Bergman asks: "Why did he subject me to this work?"

34 **Life: The Unexpurgated Edition**
by Susan Schnur

Debbie Perlman is the only Resident Psalmist in the world, a job that's been vacant for 3,000 years. "A new psalm helps people recognize that life has more holy moments in it than we think," she told LILITH.

38 **Reviews**
Francine Klagsbrun on what we learn from women who want to be rabbis; new fiction, and more.

44 **Marketplace**
Great gifts for you and everyone else.

46 **Tsena Rena**
Essential resources if you're Jewish and female.

48 **100 Years of Gratitude**
by Lesléa Newman

Why did 99-year-old grandmother have to know? Newman comes out to her beloved grandmother, and the consequences surprise them both.

Cover: From "Unpacking on the Prairie: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest." Donated to the Jewish Historical Society by her daughter Ione Steigler.

To contact LILITH: 250 West 57th Street, Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107 Phone: (212) 757-0818 Fax: (212) 757-5705 e-mail: lilithmag@aol.com

Retailers: Contact these distributors to carry LILITH: DeBoer's (973-667-9300), Desert Moon (505-474-6311), Ingram (800-627-6247), Koen Distributors (609-235-4444), New Leaf (770-948-7845) or Small Changes (206-382-1980).

LILITH occasionally makes its mailing list available to organizations or publishers. If you do not want to receive such mail, please send label & request to: LILITH, Dept. LIL, P. O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834.

To subscribe: Individual subscriptions $18/4 issues; institutions $24/ 4 issues. In Canada add $6/year; other overseas add $8/year. (US funds only). Single copies $6. prepaid. Change of address, or delivery problems: send correspondence with subscription label to: LILITH, Dept. LIL, P. O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834, or call 800-783-4903 or 212-757-0818.

LILITH is published by Lilith Publications, Inc., a non-profit organization. Copyright © Lilith Publications, Inc. 1998. All rights reserved under international and Pan American Conventions. Associate member American Jewish Press Association. Indexed in Index to Jewish Periodicals and in Jewish Abstracts. Available from University Microfilms International. ISSN 0146-2334. www.lilithmag.com

IN OUT

from the editor

Some male rabbis are making pretty strange bedfellows. They appear to be drawn into an alliance with the Christian Right to oppose abortion rights in the guise of lobbying against so-called "partial-birth abortions." I recently attended part of an all-day conference in Washington which made me feel as if I had stepped into a world where words no longer had meaning, where Jews sound like Bible-thumping evangelical Christians, and where the solid wall we count on to keep church and state separate was viewed as a permeable membrane.

The occasion? A gathering at Catholic University on "Exploring How the Jewish Community Can Work to Reduce Abortion" convened by the Institute for Religious Values and funded by Our Sunday Visitor, a Christian organization. Orthodox rabbis, a few of their Conservative colleagues, and one Reform rabbi (all male) set forth their views on abortion and Jewish law (which states that the life of the mother takes precedence over the life of a fetus and that, as one has the right to stop a "pursuer," if the fetus is viewed as a pursuer then abortion is permitted). So what was scary about Jews telling Christians about Jewish precepts on abortion? The fact that many of the rabbis opposed the present state of abortion rights in this country. The conference was convened to spread a broad canopy over the anti-choice position of the Christian Right. And the rabbis and Jewish lay people involved were, it felt to me, uncritical pawns of the Christian Right's legal crusade against choice.

If the final goal of the anti-choice forces is achieved—namely the banning of abortions altogether—even the most traditional Jew will be unable to follow Jewish law to obtain an abortion when the life of the mother is endangered by the continuation of the pregnancy. All abortions will be made illegal in the United States if the Christian Right has its way with our laws.

The Institute wants to "generate a debate in the Jewish community" and "change the attitudes" of Jewish senators so that they will enact legislation banning "partial-birth abortion," a term reiterated, with fists pounded on podiums. According to the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, this is a term with "no independent meaning. . . [it] is not a medical term, nor does it refer to an actual medical procedure. It is a term coined by anti-abortion lobbyists." One of these, Sandi Merle, a participant identified as "Jewish writer/lyricist." likens "partial-birth abortions" to child abuse and calls for "a single vote of Congress" to ban the procedure.

One of the most pernicious aspects of this cry against "partial-birth abortions" is that the term is so vague that if any such ban is enacted, doctors will fear arrest for all abortions. No specific point in the pregnancy is mentioned as the time when such "partial-birth" abortion would be different from an acceptably legal abortion. At this harrowing time, when all doctors who perform abortions, but especially Jewish doctors, fear they will be killed (or, in the case of one Canadian doctor, maimed by an anti-abortion sniper so that he could no longer work), we don't need any legislative vagueness that could be deliberately used to challenge the legality of abortions and further harass courageous doctors.

The strategy of the anti-abortion Christian Right has been to chip away at reproductive rights little by little, in the case of this conference by pulling Jews into the legislative lobby in favor of bans on some types of abortion procedures. And now their strategy gets even wilier—along with tying in to abortion rights such issues as parental notification and informed consent (topics also on the day's program), the right-wing forces now turn their attention to "end of life" issues in the attempt to draw in people opposed to assisted suicide and "euthanasia." The Washington Post, in a front-page story, described other issues around which the Christian Right is mobilizing, including pressing for legislation that would prevent a relative from deciding to take someone off life support systems. Fearing that they will not be able to stop abortions, they are trying to draw under their umbrella even those who are opposed to managed care, claiming that managed care will restrict the options at the end of life.

Lilith

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple... The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
(from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

Editor-in-Chief Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor at Large Susan Schnur
Managing Editor Naomi Danis
Associate Editor Sarah Blustain
Advertising Manager Leslie Hollis Margulies
Art Director Laurie Douglas
Intern Maren Lange

Board of Directors
Frances Brandt
Barbara B. Dobkin
Yvette Gralla
Deborah Fuller
Francine Klagsbrun
Brenda Brown Rever
Natalie Pelavin
Susan Weidman Schneider
Rachel Josefowitz Siegel

Contributing Editors
Diana Bletter, E.M. Broner, Nina Beth Cardin, Elaine S. Cohen, Rachel Cowan, Sue Levi Elwell, Reena Sigman Friedman, Rela Geffen, Blu Greenberg, Judith Hauptman, Harriet Lerner, Anne Lapidus Lerner, Audrey Friedman Marcus, Judith Plaskow, Nessa Rapoport, Sandy E. Sasso, Mary Cahn Schwartz, Amy Stone

LILITH Magazine is made possible in part through the generosity of these individuals and foundations who make tax deductible contributions to LILITH Publications, Inc.

Sustainers:
New York UJA Federation,
Brenda Brown Rever, The Shefa Fund

Sponsors:
Jan Aronson, Susan Askanase

Friends:
Judith Hauptman, Juliet Spitzer

Donors:
Naomi Isler, Nessa Rapoport, Ellene Shapiro

Rabbis and other Jews need to keep their wits about them. For Jewish spiritual leaders to allow themselves to appear closely aligned with those who would ban abortion altogether is to mock, it seems to me, the careful distinctions Jewish law sets up to differentiate among circumstances under which abortion is the right choice.

Susan

—Susan Weidman Schneider

"The Voices of Women." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own strong voices.

Edith Stein's Legacy—A Reflection

In 1942, Edith Stein was murdered as a Jew. In 1998, she was canonized as a Christian martyr. The irony is complex and her beatification in 1987 and recent canonization have been fraught with controversy [see LILITH, Winter 1991]. Stein's family members are still bitter over what they view as her abandonment of her people, culminating in 1933, when she entered the Cologne Carmel. They are not assuaged by her statement to her sister—also a convert—when they were arrested, "Come, Rosa, we are going for our people."

Some of her family members are also concerned with the Church's motives in canonizing her: Is it a move to bridge the gap between Catholics and Jews? Or is it, as the more cynical claim, an attempt by the Church to paper over its guilt for remaining largely silent in the face of Nazis atrocities?

The questions of who owns Stein's memory and how it should be "used" by history are explored in a volume of speeches, letters and reflections by Christians and Jews, including some who knew Stein, *Never Forget: Christian and Jewish Perspectives on Edith Stein* (Institute for Carmelite Studies), edited by Waltraud Herbstrith. To Jews, she was no longer a Jew; to the Catholics in this book, she was a "Catholic Jew," a fulfilled "Jewish Christian," "a great daughter of Israel," and a "daughter of the Church." To most of the book's Catholic authors, she suffered as Jesus suffered, "in co-redemption," offering "her life for those condemned to death." To Jews, such explanations are alien, even condescending. Yet we cannot discount the wise words of Jan H. Nota, who saw the beatification of Stein as a stimulus to Jewish-Catholic dialogue, beginning

with the Church's admission that Stein and all the Jews were not only the victims of the Nazis, but also of Christians who feared "for their own lives while their Jewish brothers were murdered next door."

Still, the question persists: Was Stein a martyr? Christian martyrdom involves the *conscious* choice to die for a cause. How, then, can a Jewish victim of the Holocaust be a Christian martyr? The Jews were not given a choice. They were not asked to renounce their faith in order to live; they even lacked the power of self-definition. They were Jewish by Nazi dictum.

Stein herself knew this. For about nine years she tried to convince the Church to intervene for the Jews. In 1933 she made a plea to the pope to publicly denounce Nazi policy against the Jews. Later she asked him to assist her own escape to a Swiss convent. Her efforts failed. She was murdered along with six million other Jews because she was Jewish in the eyes of the Germans.

Edith Stein was neither a Jewish martyr nor a traditional Catholic one. She did not, like Christian martyrs, go to the gas chambers in defense of her faith. Nor can she be counted among those who in Jewish martyrology died for *Kiddush HaShem*, sanctifying God's name, because she had already renounced her Judaism. Vulnerable as a Jew, conspicuous as a convert to Catholicism, her legacy to Catholics and Jews lies in her enduring truth as one more victim of Nazism and the silence of the nations during the Holocaust. Contention over her status as a martyr avoids the more essential issue of the Church's response to the Holocaust.

—Myrna Goldenberg

Jewish Doctors at Risk

We join men and women across the country in condemning the slaying of Dr. Barnett A. Slepian, an obstetrician/gynecologist who also worked at a Buffalo, NY, abortion clinic. Dr. Slepian was killed in October in a series of sniper attacks against doctors who perform abortions. Four of the five attacked have been Jewish.

The American Jewish Congress tied the murder to a "demonic religious belief . . . that [provides] encouragement for the murderers. . . . It is these perverse views that account for these atrocious acts." The Rev. Flip Benham, of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, has maintained that Dr. Slepian "murdered countless thousands of innocent children . . . . Until the abomination of *Roe v. Wade* is removed, He [God] will not even hear our prayers."

Send donations for the Slepian case to: Pro-Choice Network of Western New York, P.O. Box 461, Buffalo, NY 10429. To support local abortion rights, call your local chapter of the National Abortion Rights Action League; or the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights, (914)725-4027.

Your Help Needed

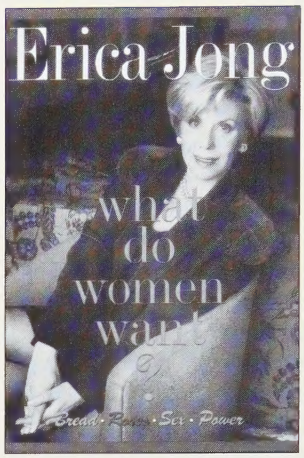
After Hurricane Mitch, Central America needs help for its 2.8 million newly homeless. In Honduras, mudslides and floods destroyed 70% of the roads and bridges; development has been set back 20 years, the U.N. reports. Malnutrition and cholera threaten survivors in El Salvador and Nicaragua, where 80% of the staple bean, rice, banana and coffee crops were ruined. Contact: American Jewish World Service's Hurricane Relief: (800)889-7146; CARE: (800)521-2273; or UNITE!'s Relief Fund: (212)265-7000.

Erica Jong, Naomi Wolf Announce, "Women Want More!"

At a sexy gathering on the publication of Erica Jong's book, *What Do Women Want?* (HarperCollins), the author sat on the stage of Manhattan's Town Hall theater with Naomi Wolf to answer the question that her book's title poses. In a dialogue moderated by don't-blame-*guys*-for-date-rape Katie Roiphe, they bantered about just what it is we most urgently crave.

"More," said Wolf. "Better orgasms. More touching. More love. . . . We really are demon goddesses of lust." (No surprise, coming from the author of *Promiscuities*.)

"We want work, we want bread, we want roses," proclaimed Jong, echoing her book's subtitle. In a discussion largely about material comfort, Jong's invoking of a labor-movement hymn seemed ironic as she sat in her short-short skirt suit (olive green; Wolf's mini was blue). "In the past," she said,



"women had to give something up in order to get what they wanted. Women want not to have to chop off half of themselves." Though Wolf confessed her exhaustion as a working mother, the gathering was really a victory celebration for American women who've made it.

Despite these gains—and contrary to Time Magazine's cover, "Is Feminism Dead?"—the consensus was that feminism is very much alive. (Time, Jong informed the group, has published 118 articles since 1970 "trashing feminism.") In fact, feminism is now new and improved.

"The fact that you've got empowered women on the right and empowered women on the left screaming at each other," said Wolf, is a sign of a more "liberal feminism." Indeed, even Roiphe and Wolf did their almost-successful best to avoid their past sparring on date rape.

They pointed to the absence of an official feminist position on the recent White House scandal as more evidence of this diversity. Clearly, however, Clinton still held their hearts. "It's a shame he's so scuzzy," said Jong. Absolutely, agreed Wolf, "It's a world I prayed for in the evil '80s of Reagan."

Both women reserved their harshest judgments for the treatment of Monica Lewinsky in the press [see page 6]. They said Lewinsky has been

Says Young Neo-Con: Women Don't Want It Anymore!

If women knew what was good for them, they'd wear skirts to their ankles, remain virgins til marriage, stay off Prozac, and hold on to their dreams of finding the perfect man.

That, at least, is the opinion of 23-year-old Wendy Shalit, who is following her own advice to a T. With assaults on the sexual revolution, women's liberation, political correctness and co-ed bathrooms, Shalit's new book, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (Free Press), is sure to make her the new favorite *enfant terrible* of neo-cons everywhere. Her appearances in City Journal, Commentary and the Wall Street Journal make it clear they've already taken her under their wing.

What's new about Shalit's polemic is certainly not her advocating of conservative dress or sexual restraint. She thanks the Orthodox Jewish tradition—which she's recently adopted—for that. (By the way, we're not talking total chastity here: While Shalit is devoted to her premarital virginity, she did admit to

LILITH's editors that she'd like to make sure any potential husband is a "good kisser.") What she'd like conservative women to realize is that rape, harassment, anorexia and a whole host of body- and sex-related issues are indeed problems for women; and she'd like feminists, who already know this, to recognize that the solution is *modesty*. "A man who is respectful of modesty doesn't date rape, he doesn't sexually harass," she declared.

Shalit, who arrived for an interview in an ankle-length suit and high-heeled boots, grew up in a home where, as she describes it, her father encouraged her and her two sisters to speak their minds. (Readers can still find sister Ruth's opinions in the New Republic). Shalit returns again and again to her father as her model, her judge and her cheering squad. A "free-market economist" by profession, he was of the mind that "feminists were exaggerating," and the rest of the family fell in line.

Arriving at Williams College, Shalit planned to follow her father in his study of economics, "but," she confesses, "I was totally distracted by the social drama." There was a sex scene but no courtship (the casual "hook-up" was the preferred form of sexual gratification), many of her friends were on Prozac ("If it's hard for you to be indifferent about sex, just try harder. Take Prozac," she writes sarcastically), eating disorders were widespread and—much to her surprise—"the feminists were not exaggerating in terms of date rape or harassment." Shalit first stirred up trouble on

repeatedly described as "pushy" and "oversexed" and suggested that anti-Semitism and ethnic stereotyping accounted for some of the indelicate treatment. If she hadn't been a "voluptuous Jewess," said Jong, America would have treated her much more protectively.

Questions of real activism on such issues as family leave came up—briefly—only when women in the audience insisted. Wolf did announce the creation of The Woodhull Institute, a leadership training center to help "young women . . . become powerful agents of ethical change." Some of the cruelest abuses against women today —among them, Afganistan's new edict forbidding women from going to school—were sadly and notably absent from the entire discussion of what women want.

—Sarah Blustain

campus when she wrote an article in Commentary suggesting that women really didn't like sharing bathrooms with men in their dorms.

Disgusted by the attitude that "promiscuity is sexy," Shalit told LILITH she felt she "had to decide, 'Which is worse for women: that virginity be prized or that virginity be derided?'" Retagging virginity with an elevated, Victorian price-tag, however, offers no solution to date rape or harassment. History has already disproved that notion.

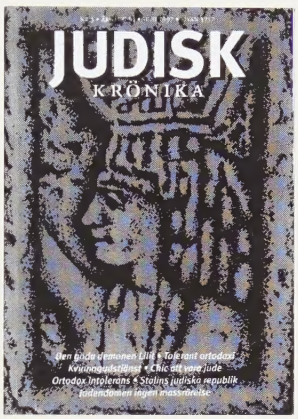
Though Shalit poses some interesting questions, her simplistic answers are a disappointment. Her clothes are her own business, but for her to claim that women who do not share her sense of style are to blame for whatever happens to them is neither fair nor logical. What Shalit has achieved with her return to modesty, aside from a change of wardrobe, is simply a convoluted defense of her own virginity.

—S.B.

Lilith Gets an Image-Lift

Seducer of men? Killer of babies? No matter what the old rabbis said—Lilith isn't a demon anymore.

We really knew things were turning around when a woman called to ask our editors' opinions on naming her baby Lilith. (All in favor!) We referred her to a recent issue of a Swedish magazine, **The Jewish Chronicle**, which featured a bright purple Lilith on its cover. Explained writer Suzannah Gottfarb about her special interest: When she called to register her newborn daughter as "Lilith," the Swedish authority wouldn't accept the name. "I know," Gottfarb reports telling them, "Lilith is a mankiller and a child-strangler. For me she is not like that. She is a free, wild, proud and independent woman. . . . Just how I want my daughter to become." Eventually the authority backed down.



It was out of that interest that Gottfarb, a single mother of three, wrote her cover story. Linking Lilith to "dangerous," seductive women of television and film, she writes, "They are all daughters of Lilith, like myself and many modern women with me, who struggle with their chins high, after one or several broken marriages; alone we raise our children and try at the same time to be successful in work. . . . Like Lilith we cherish freedom and independence more than social security."

For all those women (and men) drawn to Lilith's strength of spirit, a new educational space has sprung up in Northern California. What else? **The Lilith Institute.** Described as "a center for the study of sacred text, myth and ritual," the institute offers lectures and classes like "Lilith and Eve as Role Models," "Reclaiming the Erotic Lifeforce as Sacred" and "The Challenges of Raising a Non-Sexist Child."

The nod to Lilith, says creator Deborah Grenn-Scott, dates back to her research at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion more than a decade ago. Lilith became the inspiration for her thesis, "Lilith as Everywoman in Ancient Text and Modern Midrash: Transforming a Demonized Eros."

Check out **www.lilithinstitute.com** for more information. Then scoot over to **www.serpentina.com** —created by two of Green-Scott's collaborators—a brand new site promoting the "research projects and social activism of women who are weaving together threads . . . to reveal, activate and celebrate the Sacred Feminine in the 21st century."

Among the new resources, you soon will find a brand new anthology, ***Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Create the World's First Woman*** (Jason Aronson). Introduced by Naomi Wolf and edited by Enid Dame, Lilly Rivlin and Henny Wenkart, the anthology includes commentaries on the myth of Lilith by more than 50 Jewish women, exploring just who she is to men, to other women, to the family, and to herself.

The writings "surely illustrate what happens to Lilith when she comes out of a women's experience rather than from a man's head," writes Rivlin in her afterword.

Inexplicably, this quirky book celebrates songs, singers and stats from the Lilith pop-music festival (no Jewish content that we can see), but rates LILITH Magazine, now in it's 22nd year of publishing, worthy of one sentence! We can only reason that the book's respected editors assume their readers are LILITH subscribers already, and thus the magazine needs no further introduction . . . *—S.B.*

Just When You Thought It Was Safe to Read the Press . . .

Monica Lewinsky has been the object of plenty of less-than-charitable attention. Now the co-editor of **NewVoices,** a national monthly publication of the Jewish Students Press Association, has added his own. Sam Apple's "Reflections on Monica's Bat-Mitzvah," published in the paper's March issue, explores her opposing impulses of passivity and aggressiveness with the full range of stereotypes that have for decades plagued Jewish women.

In his satirical account, Apple invokes "your typically tacky Beverly Hills bat mitzvah." He writes, "(I'll never forget the image of Monica flying around the sanctuary with the Torah cradled in her arm, lasers shooting out the open arc below.) But even amidst this shameful display, there were signs that the young woman chanting the She'ma from the synagogue's rafters was only just beginning to embarrass the Jewish community."

In this bit of fantasy, Lewinsky concludes her *d'var Torah* "with the moral that it is a mitzvah for a Jewish girl to perform oral sex on the President of the United States. . . . 'As an American and a Jew, I feel it is my duty to earn my presidential knee-pads,' the fiery young Monica bellowed from the *bimah.* 'What better way . . . to show the world the strength of the Jewish community than to literally have the president's nuts in my fist.'"

Apple imagines the fictitious Lewinsky thanking her aunt for teaching her to "be assertive and to eat well," and her grandmother for teaching her "to believe in my ability to touch people." The crudeness that follows from these reference leaves nothing to be imagined. And just why has she hatched such a plan? "Because it will be good for the Jews."

Apple told LILITH that the piece, which came out well before the Starr Report, was a satire on the chauvinistic assumptions the media was making about Lewinsky. "I would never write or publish anything I believed was misogynistic," Apple said. "I wanted to satirize the media's presentation of Lewinsky as a meek, naive intern. Everyone was assuming that she was a victim, and I wanted people to stop and ask why it is so easy for them to assume that the female is the victim. Perhaps she was the one with the power in the relationship."

In an October 6 essay headlined "Princess Monica: Why the Starr Report and the Tripp Tapes Make Jewish Women Cringe," **Salon** magazine writer Lori Leibovich looks at why, despite her own revulsion at the term, she feels compelled to call Monica Lewinsky a JAP. It's predictable stuff, what with the "remarkably bouncy and shiny hair," with her "lunching at the Ritz-Carlton" and demanding prestigious jobs. "Taken together, the external, superficial signs of her princessdom—she is affluent, well-coiffed, zaftig and spends a lot of time on the phone—and her cunning, manipulative streak . . . may well tarnish the image of Jewish women everywhere."

> "The external, superficial signs of Monica Lewinsky's princessdom may well tarnish the image of Jewish women everywhere."
>
> —Salon Magazine

Leibovich's own search for the silver lining in this situation concludes under a pretty dark cloud: that Lewinsky "finally defies one tenacious JAP stereotype—that of the frigid lover. Monica was downright provocative, teasing the president with a peek at her thong underwear, grabbing his crotch in a meet-and-greet line, going down on him on demand. Perhaps this will be Lewinsky's great contribution to Jewish womankind, the emancipation of her sisters from their perceived state as neurotic prudes." We hate to sound ungrateful, but . . .

"An Open Letter to Girls and Women" appeared in the September 18 Jerusalem section of the **Jerusalem Post,** blaming some women's clothing styles for violence against others. "Are you sure," asked the letter writer, "you want to continue exciting men so that they rape and sexually abuse babies, young children (girls and boys) and older women?

"You are sending a lot of abused people to turn to the support groups for those who have been raped and/or sexually abused—and it's getting worse. The numbers are growing steadily.

"Is this really what you want to carry on your conscience?

"I hope that the next time you hear of a rape or sexual abuse of innocent people, your conscience will wake you up enough to dress you decently for the next day's outing.

—Chaya Rochel Schwartz."

The section's editor, Ruthie Blum, said the letter was not written in response to any specific article, and she declined to say what prompted her to run it. She also said the paper had received "much angry response," some of which has been published in the newspaper.

Was Jesus God's gift to women? You might think so after reading John Updike's review of Cullen Murphey's *The Word According to Eve: Women and the Bible in Ancient Times and Our Own* in the September 14 issue of **The New Yorker.** Citing an essay in the anthology by Leonard Swidler, he writes, "Again and again his [Jesus'] preaching and actions dismiss the taboos of a sexist and xenophobic Judaism. . . . Christianity, though not exempt from sexism, offered women spiritual equality and importance."

Updike, in the same review, in a magazine noted for its scrupulous copy-editing, misspelled the names of *two* women scholars. They were Brandeis professor Bernadette Brootten, not Brooten; and Assyrianologst and Sumerologist Tikva Frymer-Kensky, whose first name, meaning "hope," was turned into the meaningless Tivka.

—*S.B.*

letters

Lilith welcomes letters to the editor, articles, fiction, poetry and memoirs. We reserve the right to edit letters for syntax and length.

Speak up for the Vulva

I love Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* and I'm an enthusiastic fan of her brilliant and radical work. But I have to admit that I'm disheartened that she didn't name her book and play *The Vulva Monologues.* I know that the word "vulva" doesn't roll off our tongues the way the word "vagina" does. But it matters that we misuse the word "vagina" to refer to everything "down there" ("Vagina Monologue," LILITH, Fall 1998).

For the past two decades I've been trying to get the words "vulva" and "clitoris" into our collective vocabulary. My first serious attempt to raise vulva consciousness was directed toward my professional colleagues. When I joined the staff of the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, I published a paper called "Parental Mislabeling of Female Genitals as a Determinant of Penis Envy and Learning Inhibition in Women." A case example illustrated how the failure to accurately label the girls' external genitalia contributes to shame and confusion about sexuality, as well as to inhibitions toward "looking" and learning.

The article appeared in 1974 in a prestigious psychoanalytic journal and was met with a dignified silence. I received only two reprint requests, both from Germany. My colleagues (along with the world) continued to use "vagina" when they meant "vulva."

Interestingly, in Freud's time, the words "clitoris," "vulva" and "labia" were not included in the dictionary and, in this country, the only word in Webster's dictionary to refer to female genitalia was "vagina." If we think carefully about our failure to acknowledge that the vulva, including the clitoris, is an important aspect of "what girls have," the concept of "penis envy" takes on a new meaning. But although the appropriate additions to Webster's have since been made—little has changed, linguistically speaking, since Freud's day. Not only do parents fail to tell their daughters that they have a vulva that includes a clitoris, but the very idea of such communication produces a curious reaction of embarrassment and discomfort in otherwise mature persons of both sexes.

Feminism has taught us much about the power of naming and misnaming—and the importance of knowing the difference. Surely, we can muster the clarity and courage to say "vulva" when we mean vulva, and "vagina" when we mean vagina. Surely, we can tell our daughters precisely what they do, indeed, have.

Harriet Lerner
Topeka, KS

Image Issues

I was troubled that Jewish men, in the study of "How We Look on TV" (LILITH, Summer 1998) named a character who "doesn't look Jewish" as a positive image of a Jewish female. How can we expect to move away from stereotypes when we ourselves are embracing them. I have often been told "but you don't look Jewish." My standard response is, "What does a Jew look like?" This forces people to confront their preconceived notions. We as Jews come in all shapes, sizes and colors. It is time to embrace our diversity and share it with others.

Lillie Rizack
Lancaster, PA

LILITH Favorites

I'm a native New Yorker, an avid reader of LILITH, a poet, and currently a graduate student at the University of Chicago. I truly enjoyed your Fall 1997 issue, which was dedicated to relations between fathers and daughters. Several friends and I found much solace in reading the writing of various women and their experiences. LILITH has created a wonderful space for confronting many integral issues.

Helen Tannenbaum
Ossining, NY

GENDER & CATASTROPHE

From the Far Left...

We are all familiar with images of women as representing catastrophe: a dry-breasted mother unable to feed her child, a child suckling at the breast of its dead mother, a woman snatching food from her child, or her "heroic" opposite, a mother sacrificing her last morsel for her children.

Genocides, including the Shoah, are often the political consequences of constructions of femininity and masculinity in society. The current attacks on (en)gendering the Shoah ignore the centrality of gender in how we understand catastrophe.

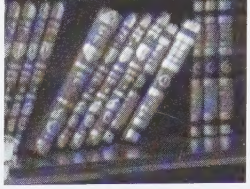
My own book *Gender and Catastrophe* is a collection of essays about catastrophes targeting women in situations from chattel slavery in the Americas, mass rapes in Bosnia, Japanese "comfort women" during World War II, the Irish and Bangladeshi famines, nuclear testing in the Pacific, major wars, the partition of India, women refugees in Australia, Israel and Russia, women and fundamentalism in Iran, women and cultural genocide in Tibet, as well as the Shoah. The book has not been attacked for "privileging feminism over catastrophe." This kind of attack seems permitted only in the case of the Shoah.

I believe that the most important reason for continuing to study the Shoah is drawing universal, rather than Judeo-centric, lessons. Studying the Shoah and its gender implications can help us understand, and perhaps prevent, future catastrophes such as the recent Rwandan and Bosnian genocides, where the "enemy" was "ethnically cleansed" via mass rapes, or the cultural genocide of Tibetans and East Timorese via mass sterilizations, forced abortions and sexual mutilation. In all these cases, genocide is exercised on women's bodies.

We cannot understand the nature of genocides without locating the experiences and images of women at the heart of the analysis. Only the feminist strategy of listening to women's personal narratives as primary sources of knowledge will enable us to comprehend the political contexts of catastrophes, which tend to use women to alter the composition of ethnic groups and to wipe out future generations, and therefore the memory, of these groups.

Ronit Lentin
Trinity College
Dublin, Ireland

continued on page 42



Right-Wing Women: Keeping Orthodoxy Safe from Feminists?

by Sarah Blustain

The setting is the early 1970s, at a private men's club in Manhattan. The occasion is a meeting of the Pace University board. When Lydia Kess, a board member, arrives at the club with her male colleagues, she is ushered into the freight elevator—as per club policy.

"I was, to put it mildly, infuriated and outraged," Kess says. At her insistence, she took the "men's" elevator down. Today a partner in a prominent Manhattan law firm, 63-year-old Lydia Kess recounts her battles—fought in elevators, lunchrooms and boardrooms—to be treated as an equal in the overwhelmingly male world of corporate law. But that is Kess' ancient history. She speaks today not as a trailblazer for younger women nor as a hero of the pre-feminist age. She has chosen Orthodoxy for several decades now, and promotes a level of religious observance—she wears long sleeves, a long skirt and a *sheitel*—that approaches Hasidism in its rigor and far exceeds many of the standards of Modern Orthodoxy, not only in dress but in life expectations as well. Sitting with a visitor in her corner office at Davis, Polk and Wardwell, where she practices corporate tax law, she talks of modesty, Torah values and a woman's place in the home.

Ultra-Orthodox women are driving a counter-feminist movement that could undermine gains made by Modern Orthodox women.

The place of women in Orthodox Judaism has come to be the most divisive subject among traditional Jews. On the one hand, right-ward moving communities have intensified their strict interpretations of Jewish law, encouraging members to make social functions like weddings—which once were coed—segregated by sex. Candy that was once considered kosher is now forbidden, and skirt hems and shirt sleeves have gotten longer in obeisance to the traditional idea that woman is essentially a seductive being to be covered up.

On the other hand, more liberal Orthodox Jews—known as the Modern Orthodox—have permitted and even encouraged women to study "forbidden texts" of the Talmud and sometimes to act as religious authorities in the synagogue. Synagogue design itself has been modified to accommodate women's growing desire to participate in the service: Many Modern Orthodox synagogues have replaced high-curtain *mechitzas*—partitions designed to keep women out of the sight of men—with low railings.

A community's decisions as to just how much public participation its women should have in the religious arena has come to signify much more than simply local custom, as modernizing elements within Orthodoxy engage in a vicious rhetorical battle with more right-wing elements.* Sensing their crucial role in this battle, women in both camps have joined in. Modern Orthodox women have become increasingly vocal and, right-wing women have responded in kind, aggressively defending the status quo. The techniques and ideology of this latter group deserve serious attention. For while their numbers may not be large now, these right-wing women represent a counter-feminist movement that, if unchecked, could undermine the gains for women made by Modern Orthodoxy.

With an evangelical urgency, some right-wing Jewish women have gone into the secular world to promote their agenda. Opening their doors to the most un-Orthodox of women, women's outreach groups like the Jewish Renaissance Center in Manhattan, where Lydia Kess teaches, or Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis' Hineni, have launched a public relations campaign to make traditional Judaism more attractive to women. The battle they are fighting may be within Orthodoxy, but the pawns appear to be impressionable secular women.

So Kess, in speaking to her audiences, must take quite seriously questions about how she can accept the *mechitza* and other side-lining constructs of Judaism when she herself has fought so hard for full membership in her professional life. Is a woman's proper place *really* in her home? Sitting in her office on the 22nd floor of a posh midtown-Manhattan office building, Kess laughs at this question. With her impressive legal career, she is not, she admits, the most impartial of commentators.

"It is a good question to ask why I feel so relaxed and comfortable in the 'segregated' [realm of the] synagogue." She explains that she accepts in Judaism what would outrage her generally "because there is a reason for it. . . . The ideal is clearly to put the emphasis on the family and the home. And I think that the woman by temperament is much more suited to that."

She laughs again, this time at her own words. "If you had said that to me in college, I would have erupted in anger. But nearly 50 years later, I think that there is a natural difference. . . . The home is the cornerstone of [a Jewish woman's] existence."

Ironies of biography aside, Kess is quite serious.

---

* Many traditionalists call their style of observance "Torah Judaism." Because this phrase implies that all other Jews are not in compliance with the Torah, Lilith has eschewed their phrase in favor of "right-wing." While also imperfect, that term does locate them in the spectrum of religious observance.

JOAN ROTH

The "Poison" of Feminism

In 1997, a coalition of forward-thinking Modern Orthodox leaders organized the First International Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy. The conference's name alone indicated just how revolutionary this event would be. While thinkers and activists like Belda Lindenbaum, Norma Joseph and Blu Greenberg, had been struggling for years over the place of women in Modern Orthodox Judaism, feminism—with it's challenge to traditional patriarchal hierarchies—had become the symbol of contemporary America's threat to Jewish tradition. The very use of the word put the Orthodox establishment on notice.

Feminist concerns had been roiling the Orthodox world well before the 1997 conference. As Orthodox women demanded rights in divorce, prayer, Jewish learning and religious leadership, the Orthodox mainstream began to dig in its heels. However, with attendance at the two Feminism and Orthodoxy conferences far surpassing expectations (2,000 people attended the 1998 event), and with tremendous coverage appearing in the general press, the question of women's roles in Orthodox Judaism was catapulted to the top of the community's agenda.

The response wasn't pretty. A May 1998 article in the house organ of Agudath Israel of America, a key institution of mainstream Orthodoxy, offered a barely guarded threat to Orthodox feminists. In a piece, headlined "Feminism—a Force that Will Split Orthodoxy?," the writer recalled Agudah's rejection of Reform and Conservative Judaism, and asked, "Is the rejection of Torah *min Hashamayim* [from heaven] and the inviolability of the *Mesorah* [Tradition] by the more radical elements of Modern Orthodoxy that different from that of the Conservative and Reform movements? If not, then we must reject them with the same force."

The right-wing newspaper Yated Ne-eman, which serves an ultra-Orthodox enclave in Spring Valley, New York, ran one column calling Orthodox feminism "a movement whose poison, if left unchecked, may seep into the minds of some unaware of its essence." This poison, the article suggests, destabilizes the moral world by challenging the "root distinctions" between men and women, which "are reflected in the very different path's [sic] to Hashem's [God's] service which Jewish men and women have taken over the ages."

Women, too, are playing a key role. Aghast at the liberties they felt some were taking with Jewish law in the name of Orthodoxy, the highly successful and resourceful right-wing women of one women's learning institution in Manhattan, the Jewish Renaissance Center, planned their counter-attack. Led by Leah Kohn, a Hasidic woman, their goal has been to save Orthodoxy from feminists, and to save formerly secular feminists for Orthodoxy. Rebbetzin Kohn, who had refused an invitation to take part in the Orthodox feminists' conference, explained why: "They say, 'I feel miserable as a woman in Torah, let me find a way to be a *man* in Torah.' *I* don't have an issue with feminism and Judaism because I know that being a Jewish woman is great."

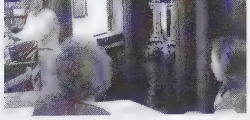
"Women did not feel secondary in Judaism until women's lib started *–outside* of Judaism."

–Leah Kohn

The Divine Antidote

Rebbetzin Kohn's formal response was The First International Jewish Women's Conference. Convened in the spring of 1998, it bore little resemblance—aside from its name and hearty attendance—to the First and Second International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy. In February, hundreds of Orthodox feminists had come together to challenge Jewish law to address the needs of women. Four months later, Kohn was drawing hundreds of women to address themselves to the needs of Jewish law.

Attending the conference were 450 women from diverse background, about an equal mix of Orthodox and



secular students drawn by the aggressive recruiting of the Jewish Renaissance Center. With her 1990s professionalism on the one hand and her proselytic zeal for ultra-traditional Judaism on the other, chairwoman Lydia Kess was a perfect role model and teacher for these overachieving Jewish women in search of meaning. The conference, held in the gracious rooms of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, promoted a platform of modesty (in *attitude* as well as dress), family, women's intuition and a particularly feminine spirituality. The conference organizers hoped, as Kess put it, to project an image of the observant Jewish woman as "very happy and content." Far from being the self-sacrificing, undervalued and marginalized woman that liberal feminists might imagine her to be, the religiously observant Jewish woman Kess portrays far surpasses secular women in her "unparalleled ability to achieve self-fulfillment and improve our environment."

Teachers were gathered from around the world to help women to understand that feminist enthusiasm for women's careers undermined the sense of purpose women historically drew—and *naturally* draw—from nurturing a family. Echoing right-wing evangelical Christians, this approach is explicitly anti-feminist and designed to capitalize on the frustrations of women who receive kudos for their careers but still feel burdened and unappreciated when it comes to keeping their husbands and children fed, clothed and loved.

The speakers knew well their audience's concerns. Nineties buzzwords like "self-fulfillment" and "personal growth" peppered their speech. They even acknowledged the satisfaction they themselves derive from professional success (though they warn against putting too much stock into that positive feeling). And they sought to answer the questions their secular audience struggle with daily in their own lives: What's so great about being Supermom? Is this really what we fought for? Do I have to be a man to succeed? What about femininity? Is this all there is?

The Jewish Renaissance Center and other right-wing groups have answered in sympathy: Yes, they say, you're right to be frustrated. The world you have encountered *is* inhospitable to women, it *is* materialistic and selfish, it *is* devoid of meaning. If single women feel sexually vulnerable, blame it on the sexual revolution; if overworked moms feel a spiritual void, blame it on the feminists. Feminists, this argument goes, disrupted the divine plan. And the solution, of course, is divine—a return to the "natural" gender roles God intended.

"Modesty and Mothering"

"On the physical level," rang the voice of learned lecturer Tziporah Heller in the grand meeting hall of the American Bar Association, "we think of women as life-givers. The question is, can women revivify the world?"

While they reject feminism as a failure and ask women to return to traditional roles, Heller and other speakers were coopting the idea of women's power. The odds seemed to be in their favor, what with the formal setting, the conference's sponsorship by Republic National Bank and the hundreds women who attended the Jewish Renaissance Center event.

They came to learn about themselves. Subtitled "Women as Healers of the Jewish Nation: Prospects for the 21st Century," the conference offered a vision of a world in which women would have primary responsibility for—and receive primary respect for encouraging—the spiritual evolution of the Jewish people. While Orthodox feminists have been demanding organizational leadership roles—control over their own prayer groups, official positions in synagogues—the speakers in this group brought in by the Jewish Renaissance Center from around the world were offering women the possibility of a very different kind of leadership. In their vision, women have no future in the rabbinate or in any of the public religious activities that are obligations for men. Instead, women are to take on a kind of kitchen leadership, in which the

What Do We Do With Adam's Rib?

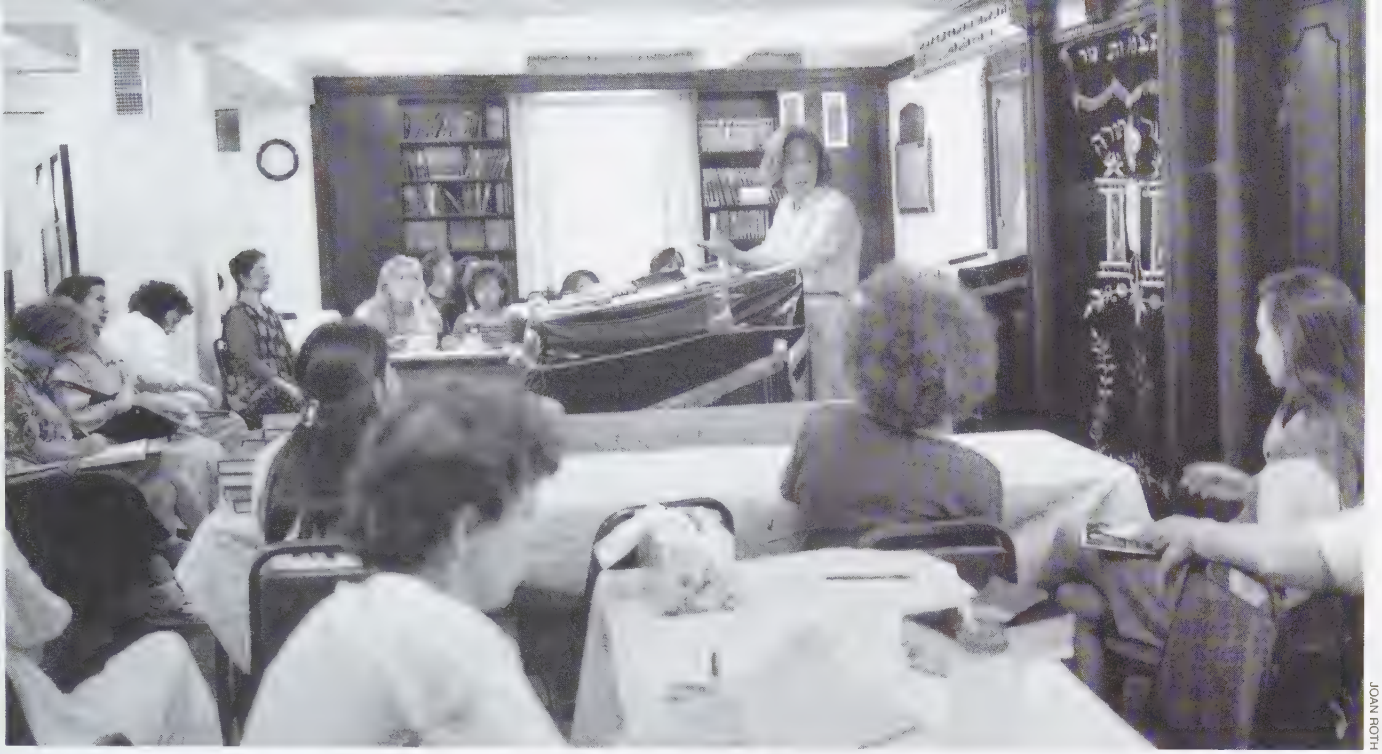
Genesis 2:21 tells us, "The Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs. . . . And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman." A quick read suggests that Eve was created second, that she was—almost literally—his offspring, and that she was, as it says in 2:18, to be "a fitting helper for him," an *"ezer k'negdo."*

But the Orthodox women of the Jewish Renaissance Center claim that the text offers a vision of pure gender equality, and they mold it until it appears to do so. Their logic is often innovative, but it is also intended to deceive. While these teachers hope to indoctrinate students into a traditional system that endorses—indeed demands—a God-man-woman hierarchy, they need to offer their secularly educated students a vision of full equality.

Mina Glick, a doctoral candidate and an ultra-Orthodox woman herself, retranslates the text, turning Adam's rib into Adam's *side*. According to Glick, Adam was originally a two-faced creature, comprising what would become male and what would become female. When Adam and Eve were divided, it was on equal footing.

Chana Kalsmith, a lecturer on feminism and Orthodoxy, focuses on the the passage in which Eve is created to be "a fitting helper" to Adam. Choosing the translation, "a helpmate to oppose him," she explains: "When I first heard this I said, 'A helpmate to oppose him?! Is she supposed to do his dishes, is she supposed to do all the work for him?!'" But they were in Eden, she explains, where "there were no dishes, there was no cooking, there was no mopping the floor. They led a purely spiritual existence." As for *k'negdo*, she suggests, "Someone who is subservient does not have the power . . . to oppose. . . . {Eve} has the potential to help and the potential to oppose, which also implies equality, not sameness."

JRC's house mother, Leah Kohn, downplays the significance of the creation order entirely. "Of course G-d [her spelling] had His reasons, but they don't matter for us in terms of the opportunity to connect with Him and have a relationship with Him."



JOAN ROTH

Rebbetzin Leah Kohn, head of the Jewish Renaissance Center, inspires women to Orthodoxy through learning.

guidance that they offer is to spring naturally out of their God-given feminine talents: intuition, nurturing, interpersonal sensitivity. Modesty—which includes a range of selfless behaviors—and mothering—toward friends, husband, colleagues and strangers as well as to children—are to be the two primary tools in their efforts to heal the world.

It's a strange message considering the biographies of the messengers: Kess holds her law degree from Brooklyn Law School (New York University, she points out in feminist fashion, did not give scholarships to female law students in the 1960s); Kohn studied biology and chemistry after graduating from the Bais Yaakov Seminary in Israel; another teacher, Mina Glick, is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, and yet another, Malca Gottesman, holds her Masters degree in public administration from New York University. Membership in the professional women's wing of the Jewish Renaissance Center, Ashir, costs $1000 annually, ensuring a highly educated, highly successful cross-section of women. So while modesty and mothering have long been hallmarks of the Orthodox woman, they were certainly not the only lodestars in the lives of these high achievers.

Which may explain the the paradoxical nature of their message. These women preach female modesty with a grandeur that seems modesty's opposite. They suggest that a woman's *ideal* place in the home, yet they have taken on very public roles in education, law, business and Jewish life. They claim for women a privileged place in Judaism, but the Judaism they promote demands women's secondary status.

Expressing attitudes more indebted to feminism than Judaism, the speakers at the conference were claiming for *themselves* a role of leadership rather than waiting for some outside (read, male) authority to confer this responsibility. Further, they encourage women to study the Jewish texts in far greater detail than tradition has allowed. Several years ago, Israeli scholar Tamar El-Or published a study of Gur Hasidic women (the sect from which Rebbetzin Kohn hails). In it she wrote, "Educated women are taught to be ignorant." Not so here. Kohn's own eminent scholarship along with her note of revolution—*we* can heal the world—makes an odd pairing with the personal humility and devotion to husband, children and home that she preaches.

It's a tricky balance to reach, asserting woman's equality with man while still endorsing her peripheral role in the public spheres of Jewish life [See "Adam's Rib," page 10]. Delving into *halachic* sources for passages that may have been passed over by generations of male scholars, these female scholars are finding ways to elevate women in Judaism's spiritual hierarchy.

"Women have the ability to transcend themselves more than any other people," announced scholar Feige Twerski. According to Twerski, the Exodus from Egypt occurred "only because of women's" faith in God. Choosing Miriam's tambourine as the conference logo (a symbol that also has been used as a defiant image at feminist seders across the continent for a decade), organizers proclaimed it a sign of their "faith in the future of the Jewish nation, and the essential role Jewish women have in shaping it." One speaker claimed, in essence, that women make better Jews because the three pillars of a Jewish life—modesty, acts of lovingkindness, and pity (or mercy)—are naturally feminine characteristics.

> The battle right-wing women are fighting may be within Orthodoxy, but the pawns appear to be impressionable secular women.

Most revolutionary of all were their predictions for the time when a Jewish messiah will redeem the world. The messianic era represents a moment when all injustices will be righted, and it seems to hold an important place in the vision of these women—despite their insistence that no injustice has been done them. One speaker tied the arrival of the Messiah through the gates of mercy to women, because in Hebrew "mercy" and "womb" are related words. Another suggested that

in the time of the Messiah, the moon—associated with femininity—will be restored to equal brightness with the sun and the feminine face of God, the Shekhinah, will reappear.

Men, in this view, are to be indulged. As the less spiritual gender, the logic goes, men need all the external trappings of *tallit* and *tefillin*, the support of a *minyan*, to maintain their faith. With so much going for her, the Jewish woman shouldn't feel insulted that she doesn't count in a minyan, as a *kaddish'l,* as a witness, a rabbi or a Torah reader. Knowing that she doesn't need these concrete reminders of her connection with God, she should feel *honored.*

The Attack on "Women's Lib"

Honored, however, may not be not the first word that comes to mind with the phrase "traditional Jewish woman." Disempowered, perhaps. Ignored. Or—as novelist Allegra Goodman portrayed it gently in her new book, *Kaaterskill Falls*—secretly disgruntled. Feminists may blame a patriarchal system, but the new ultra-traditionalists have another explanation for the dissatisfaction: feminism.

"I tell you, in all of the generations, women did not feel secondary in Judaism, until women's lib started *outside* of Judaism," Kohn explains, her English tinged with a Hebrew accent. "There really *was* a lot of discrimination against women in the secular world. . . . Women didn't get the same positions, they didn't get the same opportunity for fame, for power, for money as men did."

A Gur Hasid, Kohn wears a *sheitel*—a wig worn by traditional women to cover their shorn heads—and is well, and modestly, dressed. The offices of the Jewish Renaissance Center are also modest, and under sharp fluorescent lights she explains why no woman should feel insulted by Judaism. She's hard to like but easy to respect, and it's clear from those around her that she inspires awe quite simply by the strength of her faith. Like Kess, she does not act insulted by skeptical questions and seems eager to answer. Her manner seems to say: *Even if you show up here in a bathing suit to talk about Jewish views on premarital sex, I will help you.* It also says: *You* will *see it my way, because the Torah is eternal.*

"See, I grew up as a religious woman all my life, . . . and I knew my father and my brothers were saying *shelo asani isha* all my life," she said, referring to a morning prayer in which men thank God "for not making me a woman," a thorn in the side of some Jewish feminists. "It never bothered me because I was so confident about my place in Judaism. I know they say it, and I understood that there must be a reason, but I definitely did know that the reason is *not* because I'm less important. . . . If you feel that the men in the society refer to you as essential, so you have no issue with it."

One of the newly minted anti-feminists who spoke at Leah Kohn's conference was Chana Kalsmith, 30 and the mother of two. In college at the University of Florida she majored in

Where Lubavitch Dared to Tread

The techniques and attitudes used by the outreach arms of New York's Jewish Renaissance Center—along with Aish HaTorah or Hineni and other similar co-ed Orthodox education and outreach programs nationwide—are modeled on the methods and attitudes of the Lubavitch movement of Hasidism and its late rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

■ **The Open Door Policy.** Trained equally in Jewish and secular studies (he studied at the Sorbonne), this rebbe was responsible for reviving the Lubavitch community in America after the Holocaust—and he did so by opening the doors of his community not only to Jews who already observed Judaism in Hasidic style but to all Jews who wanted to learn.

Today's new learning centers, like the Lubavitch mitzvah-mobiles that roam the streets teaching men to put on a *tallit* and women to light the Sabbath candles, put up no bars to learning, opening doors to the ex-drug addict, the atheist and even the most heretical feminist. At lectures by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis attended by thousands weekly in Manhattan, women in sleeveless dresses listen side by side with men to hear words that encourage them toward modesty of dress and other types of observance. At another right-wing outreach program, Aish HaTorah, a man explains that he's not up to wearing a yarmulke daily—"yet."

■ **Women as Missionaries.** Key to the Lubavitcher rebbe's outreach program were women. Rabbi Schneerson's "use of articulate and appealing women to promote the status quo signified a break with earlier Lubavitch (and Hasidic) custom," writes Bonnie Morris in her new book, *Lubavitch Women in America*, a study of women's growing influence in the Lubavitch movement (SUNY Albany). He encouraged them to venture forth from their enclaves to reach secular women, giving them unprecedented access to the outside world. Before the rebbe gave his sanction to women's outreach, there was nothing in the Jewish world that would have suggested to women like Leah Kohn and Esther Jungreis that their efforts were desirable, let alone permissible.

■ **Women's Education**. If women were to venture forth from the Lubavitch enclave, however, they needed the tools with which to reach secular women. As Morris documents, the Lubavitcher rebbe "wanted visible, educated, committed women, who could compete with the visible and educated women of secular society, in order to attract *baalot teshuvah* [returnees] to Lubavitch." His endorsement of women's learning as a *mitzvah* [a commandment] and his willingness to put the community's finances toward girls' schools, has revolutionized the way women throughout the Orthodox world expect to learn.

Today, women's learning in almost all observant communities has mushroomed. Rebbetzin Jungreis' daughter, Slovi Wolf, has just started "The Advanced Judaic Studies Seminary for Women" at Hineni. "When you teach a man," she explained to LILITH, "you teach an individual. When you teach a woman, you teach a family, a community, the world."

JOAN ROTH

Pushing for a more feminist approach to Judaism are Modern Orthodox women, shown here at a Feminism & Orthodoxy conference.

women's studies and in her 20s (then named Heather Stein) she was executive director of the Washington-based Women's Information Network, an organization to promote women in political careers. She is fluent in the language of feminism, but today she has created for herself a lecture circuit explaining "the often misunderstood relationship between feminist ideals and Orthodoxy."

Kalsmith is perky and witty and not at all stern. In her argument—which contains some serious distortions—feminist women have tried to wipe out the differences between male and female by *becoming* male. Indeed, in striving to be like men, they have failed to value the feminine and have encouraged society to place male characteristics in even higher esteem. Kalsmith clearly enjoys using feminist language to disprove feminism. Speaking quickly, she uses her superior knowledge of both secular feminism and religious anti-feminism to argue her audience into submission.

"Betty Friedan speaks about how getting married and having children is giving in to your biological, sexual self, and that really a woman needs to actualize herself by going out and getting an occupation," Kalsmith told one seminar at the JRC's conference. "So what the women did—one of the greatest tragedies in feminism—is that the women went out and sought after a *male* model of success and did not fight for success on their terms. And all of society is suffering because of it."

According to this logic, women have become "meistic," materialistic, aggressive, self-promoting and physically exhibitionistic. Women themselves are suffering from this shift. When feminists told women to deny their dignified and caring nature, they tried to fix what wasn't broken. "In women's studies classes I learned that women are silenced—that's a big word in women's studies classes—because they don't naturally take credit for things. Isn't that interesting?" (Kalsmith is often a bit ironic.) "The Torah speaks about women inherently being more *tsnius[dik]* [modest], and feminism comes along and says, women are more modest and that because of it they are silenced and subjugated. . . . *Tsnius* is a way for us to tap into our power by tapping into our own source of self-esteem, knowing that . . . should come from self and our relationship with Hashem."

Kalsmith is slick. She knows that her secular audiences have been raised on words like empowerment, equality and personal growth. And she offers the option of attaining it—through Judaism. She's also a brilliant spokeswoman, drawing on her own passage from skepticism to belief. "I thought," she explained about her newly religious brother, "that he was crazy. . . . [But] the more I learned about Judaism, the more I saw how its view towards women is actually extremely empowering, and how women can actually learn to actualize themselves—all people can—and their potential, through Judaism." Empower, actualize, potential.

Kalsmith even capitalizes on the language of "difference feminists," quoting Carol Gilligan's studies of how women make decisions differently from men. "I'm just giving you a little secular knowledge," she explains to an audience of mixed—secular and religious—backgrounds, "to show you that the things the Torah has been talking about for thousands of years, the differences in the way in which men and women think, is something that people now learn in women's studies today."

This type of talk makes a terrifically appealing invitation to secular women who have felt since the 1970s that perhaps all that is "special" about women—their communication skills, their intuition, their mothering abilities—were not adequately appreciated by the women's liberation movement.

The success of the appeal, however, depends on students' ignorance. Many of the women who have

> Orthodox feminists are making the "mistake in Judaism that feminism did in the secular world, thinking that to have rights one must become masculine."
>
> –Leah Kohn

arrived on the doorsteps of the Jewish Renaissance Center have had little previous religious training. They may not know, for instance, that conceding the rabbinate to males in an observant Jewish community means that a woman must ask permission from her male rabbi to use birth control or have an abortion. They also may not know that the language of the traditional Jewish marriage contract considers her property and that the language of Jewish divorce prevents her from leaving without her husband's permission. And she certainly will not be aware of a textual tradition, so carefully researched in Naomi Graetz's new book on domestic violence, in which "justification for abuse can be clearly inferred." It also seems fair to surmise that secular students won't be taught these texts first off as they begin to dabble in right-wing Orthodoxy.

The Attack on Orthodox Feminism

In the last 25 years, Orthodox Jewish women have watched as their counterparts in the Reform and Conservative movement have fought for the right to become rabbis. They watched their daughters' more liberal counterparts be given the right to have a bat mitzvah, and to read the Torah during that service. More recently, they have even seen liberal Orthodox Jewish women demand opportunities to read the Torah (in all-female gatherings), to be equal partners in the laws of marriage and divorce, and to hold official positions of religious leadership.

These developments have made it impossible for more conservative women like Leah Kohn to practice Orthodoxy without reflecting on their own choices. As they discover that *they* are being recast as victims of Judaism's hierarchy, they, too, have had to catapult themselves upward in the religious hierarchy. The real target of their new PR campaign for traditional gender roles is not secular feminism at all but the Modern Orthodox world.

The Orthodox feminists, says the ever-confident Kohn, "are doing now the mistake in Judaism that feminism did in the secular world, thinking that to have rights one must become masculine. And as 30 years later the feminist movement has realized this isn't true, I think [the Orthodox feminists] will realize it too."

"I can understand the threat they feel," answers Blu Greenberg, who heads the new Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance and has come down on the liberal side of many Orthodox debates. Greenberg has spent two decades searching the Jewish tradition and her own heart for ways to incorporate feminism into the practice of Jewish law. She has strived, for example, to make regulations governing prayers services and divorce egalitarian. "My belief in the perfect God," she has written, "does not allow me to think that the Lord would favor one sex over the other in any area of life."

Are These Women Speaking for Themselves?

Students at the Jewish Renaissance Center echo their teachers diatribes as they turn against the women's movement:

Dora Green, 43, Monsey, NY, mother of four. Formerly an investment banker with Drexel-Burnham-Lambert.
On the transformation: "I was living my type-A life . . . when I woke up one morning and said, 'I don't want to do this.' . . . I wasn't doing anything that was uniquely me."
On feminism: "Feminism was a bill of goods that was sold that wasn't so advantageous to women. . . . Women became doctors and lawyers and Indian chiefs and got married and had children and who do you think is running their homes? You don't think that their husbands are worrying about whether there's toilet paper in the pantry, do you?"
On modesty: "Modesty and its corollary, self-control—of speech, eyes, thoughts and actions—have brought about a satisfying self-refinement that I never dreamed possible."
On Orthodox feminists: "They're missing it. They're trying to be men and they're not bringing to it what women can bring."

Robin Barsky, 34, New York City, single. Assistant executive director, Women's Sports Foundation.
On the transformation: "I woke up one day and said, 'Where is the meaning in what I'm doing?'"
On feminism: "You can say the women's liberation movement, feminism, in a way backfired because the original intent didn't allow women to explore themselves."
On modesty: "We've been brainwashed to believe that the only way we're going to get anywhere in business is to be loud."
On Orthodox Judaism: "It has allowed me to bring out a sensitive side of myself that I never thought existed."

Elizabeth Fried, 38, married. Program Coordinator at the Jewish Renaissance Center, costume designer and wardrobe stylist. Left home at 12 for a ballet career, then to Barnard, Wall Street, Harvard Business School, Yale Drama School, and Europe—to work as a fashion designer.
On feminism: "The role that feminism played for me was that I gave priority to my career ambition. I felt like I had to act like a man. . . . All these accomplishments and no spiritual or personal satisfaction."
On modesty: "If you dress in a sexy way, everyone owns a part of you. But when I dress modestly, I feel stronger, I feel safer."
On Orthodox Judaism: "It's empowering, that's for sure. And even more empowering because of the separation [between men and women]."

Kim Gantz, New York City, single. Senior Program Director, Business Week.
On feminism: "In my humble opinion, there are aspects to the movement that did a disservice to women. [It made] making career and finding a job very important. The priorities got mixed up."
On Orthodox Judaism: "I think part of my fulfillment as a Jewish woman is to be married and have a family. And my challenge is to lead a fulfilling life in the meantime."

The seemingly benign plea for equality is a thunderclap to right-wing Jewish women. When Kohn charges that Orthodox feminists are changing *halacha*, Jewish law, it is the most damning criticism she can offer. To her, the rhetoric of *halacha's* inviolability—and of Jewish woman- and man-hood's consistency over time—is sacred.

"There is no doubt that Jewish law has shifted over the years, and anyone who tells you otherwise is incorrect," retorts BatSheva Marcus, an Orthodox feminist and the co-chair, with Greenberg, of JOFA and the two Orthodoxy and feminism conferences. "Jewish law has its own sort of molasses way of shifting, and as that molasses shifts, we'd like it to be reflective of the value of women."

"We have to be careful for the filters of feminism . . . glorifying all that is male."

–Chana Kalsmith

The possibility of dialogue amid this kind of rhetoric seems nil. Kohn claims that Judaism has always valued its women; Marcus calls that position a "rewriting" of history. Kohn insists that, spiritually, men and women are divinely split along the public-private divide; Marcus rejects that premise outright. Greenberg, in the spirit of reconciliation, suggests that "there is room for distinctive roles [for men and women], just not in the same global categories that we inherited." That won't get past the women of the Jewish Renaissance Center.

Kalsmith, the formerly feminist anti-feminist teacher, chalks up the disconnect entirely to "filters." "When I came into Orthodoxy," Kalsmith explains, "I said, 'Why aren't women more in synagogue? why aren't women rabbis?' What was the problem? That I came with my filter. What has filtered into Orthodoxy is a glorification of what is male. ... So we have to be careful for the filters of society and feminism. Feminism defining us by what we *do* as opposed to who we *are*, and feminism, which is glorifying all that is male as the main thing."

"They're missing it," agrees one student about the Orthodox feminists. "They're trying to be men, and they're not bringing to it what women can bring."

Trying to be men. What Kalsmith and Green don't recognize is that seeing all the public roles in Judaism as belonging legitimately only to men is also a filter, albeit a filter in place for hundreds of years. To them, "trying to be men" apparently means trying to achieve the right to self-determination, to have a hand in the Jewish laws that govern them, to be allowed to participate in the prayers and rituals that have sustained Jewish men for ages. These mainstays of Jewish life only became "male" by definition when men closed the door of the club to women.

What the Future Holds

In the current generation of Orthodox Jews, writes scholar and Yeshiva University professor Haym Soloveitchik, "religious observance is being both amplified and raised to new, rigorous heights. . . . What is at stake here," he writes, "is not fidelity to some personal vision, but to what is perceived as the Divine Will."

For Orthodox women, the stakes in this battle are high: At the very center of the debate of Divine Will is the question of just what the divine has willed for woman. Is she, as the traditionalists would have us believe, forbidden from entering the public spheres, forbidden forever from singing in front of men, from serving—despite her high level of knowledge—as a religious authority? If the traditionalists have their way, that will be so. In fact, even the efforts to assert women's elevated status, so necessary now in the face of feminists charges of oppression, may disappear.

"Maybe 20 years from now we won't need to do it, it will be obvious as it was along history," says Kohn in a vision of the future that reveals much about her feelings for her current platform. "But being that people think that women are secondary, you have to emphasize and show them that it's not so. . . . The problem isn't in Judaism, it's a problem of an attitude that people come with to Judaism. So obviously, yes, we do fight an attitude." So what would happen if feminist thinkers were to stop challenging Judaism to create equality for women? How devoted would Kohn be to the concept of personal growth and empowerment then?

It is unlikely that Orthodox feminists will drop their challenge. Indeed, Blu Greenberg agrees with the anti-feminist writer who suggested that feminism, over the next decade, will be a force that splits Orthodoxy. In fact, she believes that the conflicts will only get worse.

This fall, a revolutionary new book appeared: *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*, an anthology by 17 female scholars on aspects of Jewish law and women, from hair coverings to birth control to women's learning. For the first time, perhaps ever, the arguments of women are gathered together as a major commentary on Jewish law. One day the Torah learning of one of these scholarly women will collide full force against the Torah learning of the institutional male authorities. And one day this collision might be on a question of her personal well-being. Is she, who has parsed the texts for years, likely to accept a ruling that, say, forbids her use of birth control when she feels unable to care for the children she has? Certainly *male* rabbinic law has not been biased against men's own comfort, and there's no reason to believe that female *halachic* authorities would operate differently.

But there is a warning here for secular feminists as well, and the questions that Leah Kohn is asking are ones feminists might consider. Every day we hear stories of impossible choices women make between joining the "man's world" and remaining at home. Whether leaving a two-month-old child at day care or leaving their professions in order to care for children these women are not encountering a world that activist feminism has succeeded in making hospitable.

The success of the Jewish Renaissance Center might serve as a needed heads-up to feminists who think their work is done. The women who are flocking to the Jewish Renaissance Center are expressing their dissatisfaction with their choices, and with the way our culture is judging them for having to make those choices. They are turning to an old system largely because it values *as the highest good* a woman's choice to fulfill her biological destiny. It's not surprising that women unable to keep up with the demands of work and motherhood might take some solace in that. Next, however, they might be saying that riding in a freight elevator has a certain dignified modesty too. ■

Israel at 51 and Beyond

It's half a century. Have we only heard half the story?

by Naomi Danis

LILITH was stunned by how many females were missing from all the heroic retellings and media markings of Israel's 50th anniversary. Despite considerable gender inequities in Israeli society, there have been plenty of women to celebrate (aside from Golda) among Israel's creators, dreamers, builders, fighters, peacemakers and prophets. So here, in a toast to the State of Israel at 51 and beyond, we applaud some of the Israeli women who have made a difference and who will shape the country next year and in years to come. They are just the tip of an amazing iceberg.

Creating Democracy

1 **MK** (Member of the Knesset) **Limor Livnat** is Minister of Communications. A member of the right-of-center Likud party,

she's the only woman of 18 cabinet members, and only one of six women cabinet members since the establishment of the State! (Building a democratic state with gender equality remains a great challenge—even in a country with one of the highest voter turnouts in the world.)

2 **Tikva Levi** coordinated "We Are Here and This is Ours," the first feminist conference for Mizrahi, Sephardi and Ethiopian Jewish Women in 1996, marking a revolution in Israeli feminism. She directs Hila, the Public Committee for Education in Low-Income Neighborhoods, Villages & Development Towns.

3 **Marcia Freedman** is often credited with energizing the new wave of feminism in Israel in the early 1970s and was a Civil Rights Party Knesset member. She founded, with other feminists, the first shelter for battered women in Haifa, in 1977. She was one of the first lesbians to go public in Israel.

4 **Zehava Gal'on** led the struggle against religious coercion at a much publicized flashpoint of conflict, keeping a multiplex theater in Petach Tikva open on Shabbat. She was the first director general of *B'Tselem*, an information center for human rights.

5 **Shulamit Aloni**, former MK, founded the Civil RIghts Movement (1973) and merged it to head Meretz (1992). She was a provocative minister of education, and later of communications. As a journalist she spurred formation of the Office of Ombudsman.

A public figure who has not always identified as a feminist, she nevertheless made important gains for women, and younger women activists on the left refer to her as a role model.

6 **Miriam Ben-Porat**, among the 40% of Israeli judges who are female, is one of the few women consistently in the public consciousness.

She is State Comptroller and Public Complaints Commissioner, a non-partisan public watchdog in a disputatious culture.

7 **Anat Hoffman**—Jerusalem City Councilwoman—is consumer advocate, outspoken on women's issues and equity in municipal services to Arab and other minority sectors.

8 **MK Naomi Chazan** is Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, a staunch feminist and director of the Truman Institute for Peace. "Israel is undergoing an identity crisis because for the first time in fifty years we have to look at ourselves in the mirror. We don't have the luxury any more of defining ourselves in terms of the enemy because we're not quite sure who the enemy is," she says.

9 **Tal Yarus-Hakak**, an acclaimed activist in the lesbian feminist community (KLAF), is an advocate on behalf of single parents.

10 **Caroline Kharman**—the only woman in her mostly Druze village to join the army, she is the first Christian women to become an officer in the Israel Defense Force. (One-fifth of Israel's 6,000,000 citizens are not Jewish.)

11 **MK Yael Dayan**—a pragmatic politico and early activist for peace—she chairs the Knesset Committee on Women

and has been responsible for bringing to the Knesset the first open discussions on issues around homosexuality and the rights of sexual minorities.

12 **Frances Raday** is a law professor at the Hebrew University specializing in labor and gender equity issues. She represented Naomi Nevo in the equity in retirement case.

What your favorite song left out

Hebrew University professor **Rivka Maoz** presented "The Image of Women in Songs of the Palmach" (the commando arm of pre-state Hagannah) at the 1998 diaspora gathering of professors of Hebrew language and literature. The egregious portraits of female passivity, the sheer left-out-ness and distortions in these Zionist songs, were met with groans and knowing laughter—a refreshing testament to the wised-up feminist assumptions of the audience. Then the lights were turned low, and everyone sang the old songs, this time with a little more sadness in their voices than usual, not only for a time that was past but in sorrow for how the women had been excluded.

13 **Nabila Espanioli** is a social worker, psychologist and educator as well as a peace activist and feminist. She directs the Al-Tufula Center for Women and Early Childhood Education in Nazareth, where young women are trained to work in early childhood education in the Palestinian community in Israel.

In Academic Life

14 **Marilyn Safir** is the first president of the newly formed Israeli Association for Gender Studies and coordinates the Israel Feminist Forum, an online chat group that has become a "must read" for Jewish feminists all around the world. She directs Project Kidma at Haifa University, which introduces women from minority groups to the university environment and trains police officers about violence against women.

16 **Ruth Calderon** founded Alma Hebrew College in Tel Aviv, "a new liberal arts center for the interdisciplinary study of Hebrew culture and contemporary Jewish identity." She moderates a Friday afternoon TV program where religious and secular guests discuss Jewish texts. She's also cofounder of Elul, a Jewish studies "learning community" of Israeli women and men from divergent points on the religious spectrum. (Alma has been attacked by the left for "tricking" secular Jews into Jewish studies, and by the right for placing sacred texts in a secular context. Read Gail Hareven's article on p. 18 for more on polarities in Israel.)

17 **Henriette Dahan Calev** is a political scientist and women's studies professor at Ben Gurion University in the Negev, and specializies in race, class and gender studies. She has been instrumental in creating space within Israeli feminism for Mizrahi women.

Artists and Social Change

18 **Amalia Kahana-Carmon's** fiction takes us into a world where sexuality and creativity bring characters back to life when disappointment has deadened them. She is considered to have paved the way for subsequent female Hebrew writers and she has been compared to Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Her writing is still not widely available in translation.

19 **Chava Alberstein** sings in Yiddish as well as Hebrew. On her latest album, "Crazy Flowers: A Collection," she

asks, "Loving your country is a natural thing. Why does love end at the border?"

20 **Savyon Liebrecht's** work "reflect(s) a deep yearning for reconciliation between people on opposing sides of conflicts," says Lily Rattok's intro to recently published *Apples from the Desert,* her

first book in English. (The title story first appeared in LILITH in 1989.)

Stumbling blocks on the road to gender equality in Israel

15 **Sharon Shenhav,** an international women's rights lawyer, is Director of the International Jewish Women's Human Rights Watch in Jerusalem. She examines several gender equality issues the Zionist dream has yet to make a reality:

Peace. The Jewish people sing of Shalom, and we pray for it daily. Women, young and old; Jewish, Christian and Muslim; Palestinian and Israeli; Ashkenazi and Mizrachi, have been at the forefront of the peace movement in our region. Women in Black, Mothers for Peace, Bat Shalom and Engendering the Peace Process are some of the groups that have taken to the streets and schools to bring their message to the Israeli and Palestinian public. But despite their unique grassroots involvement, no women sit at the negotiating tables where the "peace talks" take place.

A new approach applies human rights concepts rather than religious law.

Women's safety. Women's organizations, working together, succeeded in lobbying the Knesset to enact strong legislation, the much hailed Prevention of Violence in the Family Law of 1991. Unfortunately, despite this excellent legislation, enforcement by the criminal justice system has been weak.

Work. Economic equality continues to be an elusive goal for Israeli women. In 1995, statistics showed that 55% of undergraduate students in Israel were women. In addition, over 50% of all graduate students are women. Better educated than their male counterparts, women find themselves earning less. The gap between the average salary for a man and the average salary for a woman is over 30%. As unemployment rises in Israel, the percentage of women out of work is far higher than that of men. New immigrant women and unskilled women in development towns find that even minimum wage jobs are disappearing as textile factories move to Jordan, an unanticipated byproduct of the peace process.

Marriage and divorce. Like Jewish women elsewhere, many Jewish women in Israel are unable to obtain a religious divorce because their husbands refuse to deliver the *get* or bill of divorce. But in Israel such women (*agunot* or "chained women") have no recourse to secular courts. Civil (i.e., secular) marriage and divorce do not exist because in the early days of statehood, the secular majority in the government granted exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce to the religious courts.

And no religious court permits a woman to serve as a judge. The rabbinical courts in Israel permit only men ordained as Orthodox rabbis to become religious court judges, or *dayanim.*

A new approach applies human rights concepts to the *get* injustice. The Jerusalem-based International Jewish Women's Human Rights Watch, at the 50th Anniversary of the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is establishing a central database that will include cases of Jewish women who have been denied their basic human right to remarry and to found a family.

Right and Left: The Petrifaction of Israeli Society

by Gail Hareven

Israeli society may be the only society in the world that keeps asking itself: "Who are we?" "What is Israeli identity?" "Are we still Jews/Zionists?" "Do we have a culture?" Left-wing and Right-wing supply a sense of identity, a superficial awareness of tribal belonging and a class consciousness. Identification with one of the two camps is our substitute for political thinking. As such, division of society into Left and Right prevents us from asking new questions, indicating new goals, and responding to changes in reality.

[As one example] Benjamin Netanyahu is the first Israeli Prime Minister who has agreed to call a government meeting on violence against women. Prior to that, the terminology which he used to describe the problem was common only among crazy feminists like me: He spoke of terror. Netanyahu has good reason to appear as the defender of women—public opinion polls indicate that his popularity among women is relatively low. In the past, both Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres were asked to be interviewed on violence against women and to mark it as a national problem. Both of them declined. Perhaps the subject didn't seem important enough, or perhaps they failed to recognize the political gain they would reap.

However, Netanyahu's commitment to fight terror against women (at present, only a verbal commitment, but that's still something) stirred strange responses. With my own ears, I heard friends on the Left argue: "This is bad for us." Why? Because it contributes to Netanyahu's popularity and is likely to help his reelection campaign. This way of thinking says that the worse the situation gets, the better. It says that there is no point in helping Israeli women if we can't help Palestinian women. It says that those women who are raped and beaten by their husbands will have to wait until Israel retreats to the green line. According to this way of thinking, the wounded of Shekhem have political significance, but 200,000 battered women do not. For the only politics we have is the politics concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Neither Rightists nor Leftists will find it easy to give up the division of the world that is the basis of their strength, yet that division impedes the development of a different politics. When did we last hear of a new socioeconomic vision? What chance does a women's party have? When shall we see the price of day care or the contents of the educational system on a party platform? Who knows what social and cultural aspirations the immigrants' party holds? Why do the Sephardim represent themselves only through the ultra-Orthodox Shas party? What is the meaning of our indifference toward the way *haredi* children are educated? The limiting notions of Left and Right color the entire map and serve as instruments to preserve the power of the powerful.

The State of Israel is not cleft into two camps, or into "two peoples," as we like to say these days. Regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict, most people are in the middle. Regarding everything else, we live in a multicultural society. Put a finger on the center of the map of Israel, and within one hour's travel from that spot, you can find a neighborhood of immigrants where the children play in Russian and the old women roll blinis in the kitchen. Are they Rightists or Leftists, those old women? You can find neighborhoods where a third generation has grown up in poverty in a culture of poverty, mistakenly identified as "Oriental" culture. You can find a national religious yeshivah, find the children of foreign workers, and then find a high school on a kibbutz. From a *haredi* school for girls, you can leap to a cultural activities center in a yuppie district. When the children grow up, what will they have in common?

The melting pot no longer has many adherents, and that's good; but relinquishing the melting pot raises difficult questions about the extent of cultural differences we can bear without losing a sense of social unity. Does multiculturalism mean absolute freedom for all cultures? If we allow the *haredim* to raise their daughters in ignorance, why don't we let immigrants educate their children in Russian-speaking institutions? And if the *haredim* teach their own version of Zionism, why don't we allow the Israeli Arabs to do the same?

The limiting notions of Left and Right color the entire map.

The establishment of a multicultural society is a difficult objective. We're not talking only about celebrating Maimuna, holding a military Seder or allowing Christmas decorations. Nor are we talking about the establishment of a Yiddish theater, a Russian theater, an Arabic theater with a Communist orientation, and a theater that produces imported musicals. All these are part of multiculturalism's frills, not multiculturalism's essence.

A new social unity can be created by forming new coalitions. I experienced something of this sort about a year ago when I participated on the Zemer Committee, which dealt with newspaper advertisements for prostitutes. During the Committee's discussions, I discovered that Knesset Member Yigal Bibi of the National Religious party and I shared a view of prostitution as a moral problem. I was not surprised, but he seemed to be. Do pornographic street signs frighten only the religious Right? When will we finally gather together all who support conscription of yeshivah students? And here is a prophecy of the end of days: when the haredim sense that their educational autonomy is about to end, perhaps they will want to cooperate with the Israeli Arabs, who want a similar autonomy for themselves. Why not?

The division of the map into Right and Left petrifies society. A factionalized society needs new political alignments that will allow groups whose voice has not previously been heard to advance their interests. If we succeed in creating such ad-hoc coalitions, some of the negative images that have stuck to our politics and our politicians will vanish. New coalitions will create new possibilities of identification as well as living connections between various groups in the population. By recognizing rather than blinding ourselves to reality, we can create a new vision for our society.

Gail Hareven, author, playwright and journalist, lives in Jerusalem.

Sara: Take 2, Theater Company Jerusalem, (l-r) Ruth Wieder-Magan, Gabriella Lev, Aliza Elion-Israeli.

21 **Gabi Lev,** whose innovative theater pieces in English and Hebrew create feminist *midrash*, re-imagines the lives of Bible women with extraordinary resonance for our lives today. "It has been our theater company's great privilege," she writes, "to work with holy writings, which by their nature are capable of becoming vessels for the powerful meanings without themselves breaking. . . . So, after the Holocaust, *Megillat Esther* alludes to something more than when it was originally written. The present uncannily affects the past. And this tells me something about the nature of life."

---

22 **Gila Almagor**, noted actress in Israeli films, is also the author of two now-classic autobiographical novels made into movies, *Summer of Aviya* and *Under the Domim Tree.* She pioneered in portraying the lives of post-Holocaust orphaned adolescents in the new state.

23 **Shulamith Hareven**, novelist, poet and essayist whose titles have appeared in English to rave reviews (*City of Many Days; The Miracle Hater*), is the first woman member of the Hebrew Language Academy.

24 **Naomi Shemer**, composer and lyricist of the much beloved "Jerusalem of Gold" (*Yerushalayim shel zahav*), a song of longing for ancestral lands associated with the Six Day War that rivals "*Hatikvah.*" as a national anthem. "On the Honey and on the Sting" (*Al hadvash ve al haoketz*), occasioned by the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, implores protection for the bitter and the sweet: "Please don't uproot that which has been planted."

25 **Noa—Achinoam Nini**, who grew up in New York and returned to live in her native Israel at the age of 17, has both Israeli and international albums. Her crossover music integrates Yemenite elements, fabulous drumming, ululation—and pop music.

26 **Sara Levi-Tannai** in the 1950's created the Inbal Dance company with works drawn from Yemenite culture.

27 **Yehudit Arnon** is a dancer and choreographer who determined at 19 that she would be a dancer even though she was told she was too old. She went on to found a professional dance school, based at her kibbutz on the Lebanese border, and the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, which recently received raves in New York and Washington.

28 **Michal Govrin**, writer, poet and theater director. Her provocative novel, *The Name*, which bridges the chasm between secular and the sacred, was just published in the US.

29 **Dana International** is the 1998 winner of the immensely popular Eurovision song contest for her song "Diva Maria." This transsexual star of Israeli music, whose soaring career has helped to overcome prejudice, recently turned down an offer to join the Spice Girls.

30 **Rina Yerushalmi**, founder (in 1988) and producer, director of Itim Theatre Ensemble, a troupe of 15 actors who gestate unusual productions—most recently a four-part piece, *VaYomer, VaYelech* (And He Said, And He Walked)—reinterpreting events from the creation of the world to the receiving of the Ten Commandments.

Gathering the Exiles

In this category, a tribute to the millions of nameless *mothers* who kept their families together, fed and comforted and soothed and encouraged and cajoled them, and served as brave examples and intermediaries on their behalf in a land that was at once both home and strange.

31 **Nagist Mengesha**, director general of *Fidel*, the Association for Education and Social Integration of Ethiopian Jews, an advocacy organization that aims to "avoid paternalism by empowering the Ethiopian community." In addition to addressing government policies, it trains Ethiopian professionals in education and social welfare to address the needs of Ethiopian students.

32 **Shulamith Katznelson,** founder of Ulpan Akiva in Netanya where Hebrew *and* Arabic are taught using a conversation/immersion technique. Since 1951 it has been known for its openness to all peoples.

33 **MK Sofa Landver** (Labor) is chairperson of the Russian Immigrant Association in Israel. She made aliyah in 1977 from Leningrad (St. Petersburg), worked as a speech therapist and was elected to the Ashdod Municipal Council.

34 **MK Marina Solodkin** (Yisrael Ba'aliya, the Russian immigrant party) is an economist and political commentator. Born in Moscow, she made aliyah in 1991, and is the author of *Civilizational Discomfort: Soviet Jewry in Israel* (in Russian). She's writing a book in English on the Russian factor in Israeli politics.

35 **Bracha Arjwani** is the petite and physically hard-working organizer of *Ma'ahal,* a tent city across from the Prime Minister's office, which since 1994 continues to draw attention to the plight of the homeless and to the lack of low-income housing. Approximately 300,000 barely visible people

cannot find affordable housing and shuttle between relatives and supportive friends.

36 **Ida Nudel**—former refusenik, tireless trouble maker for good causes, established "Mother to Mothers," which operates after-school centers in Ashkelon, Ofakim, Beer Sheva and Netivot, served by volunteers—a help especially to single mothers.

37 **Belaynesh Zivadia**, first Ethiopian Jew (male or female) to serve in the diplomatic corps. She is Consul of academic affairs and minorities in Chicago.

The Personal/ The Political

38 **Gila Svirsky** is director of Bat Shalom, a feminist center for peace and social justice located in West Jerusalem. In 1994, after the Oslo Accords, they joined with Jerusalem Center for Women in Arab East Jerusalem to form Jerusalem Link and sponsor joint demonstration against human rights violations and promote feminist ideas to the Israeli and Palestinian public.

39 **Galia Golan**—a founder of Link (see above) and a spokesperson for Peace Now. She is a US-born political scientist, expert in Soviet foreign policy. She founded the first women's studies research center (Lafer) in Israel at Hebrew University.

40 **Ruth Rasnic**—founder of the second battered women's shelter, in Herzliya. It's need for financial support spurred the founding 20 years ago of US/Israel Women to Women, which continues to sponsor a variety of women's projects in Israel.

41 **Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian,** a professor at the Hebrew University, initiated the first hotline in 1992 for Palestinian women who are victims of abuse. Working within a traditional culture where the solution to a rape

ARIEL JEROZOLINSKI/SCOPUS MAGAZINE

New women's organizations enrich Israeli society

Women also are responsible for "many of the new organizations and coalitions and expansions of existing organizations that," according to Bar Ilan University Professor Dafna Izraeli, not only "enrich civil society and democracy in Israel [but also] provide women with a potential power base." **The Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women** was established in 1992 by a coalition of women Knesset members across the political spectrum and became a permanent standing Knesset committee in 1996. Since then, the Knesset has passed over 40 legislative measures in areas such as equal pay, affirmative action and domestic violence. **Israel Women's Network** was founded in1984 by Alice Shalvi as the first umbrella organization linking Israel women's groups for the purpose of working on women's issues. The IWN has urged women to get out and vote, and encourages persons of any sex to vote for women—regardless of party. For more information on legislative issues, read the IWN Newsletter; for statistics on issues such as housing, higher education, check out **The Israel Equality Monitor**, published by Barbara Swirsky. **Project Nisan** trains high school girls of various backgrounds to become leaders. Sama Salach-Zreik, its new director, is the first Arab to lead a co-existence organization in Israel. **Israel Association of University Women's** scholarship program is unique in having no age restrictions and has over 20 years granted doctoral and master scholarships to more than 300 women. **The Counseling Center for Women**, a nonprofit mental health center informed by feminist perspectives, was founded by a collective of women therapists in 1988. It offers therapy and trains welfare officers on gender-sensitive issues in therapy. **The Israel Sexual Assault Victims Help Center Union**, founded in 1990, is an umbrella for centers in cities and towns across the country, with 24-hour emergency hotlines and programs such as the Clotheslines Project and Take Back the Night marches. **Women of the Wall** began in 1988 when a group of Israeli and foreign women were violently attacked when they went to pray at the Western Wall and read from a Torah scroll while wearing prayer shawls. Following an unsuccessful appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court, a government committee came up with the solution—they should pray somewhere else. The women object, and the struggle goes on. They gather every new moon to pray together [watch LILITH's Tsena-rena column for updates]. The **Feminist Studies Association** is the umbrella group for women's studies centers at universities across the country. **Women's Organization for Political Prisoners (WOFPP)** was founded in 1988 to bring to Israeli public attention incidents of human rights violation suffered by individual Palestinian women in military jails. **Women in Black,** in response to the *intifada*, began gathering every Friday afternoon, wearing black at a central square in Jerusalem to mourn victims of violence and call for an end to the occupation. The demonstration spread to 33 other locations in Israel and became of symbol of peaceful protest that was imitated around the world. (The founding woman wished to remain anonymous.) **Women in Green** conduct their protests against Israeli concessions of occupied territory in the peace process. (Evidence that women want to be heard on this side of the political spectrum also.)

The Second Zionist Revolution

by Leah Shakdiel

I moved from Jerusalem to Yeruham in 1978, as a sabra finding an outlet for her Zionist idealism. Together with a group of *olim* from the West, we settled in Yeruham, the first development town in the Negev, founded in 1951 during Israel's greatest immigration period. We were committed to *halakhah*, social responsibility, the pursuit of peace, and ecological concerns. Note that women's issues were not part of the baggage, though the group was fanatically democratic in its decision-making processes and in our marriages we were struggling with egalitarian notions of homemaking and child-rearing.

I ended up marrying a member of the group, a third-generation American Jew, son of civil rights activists, psychologist Moshe Landsman. I brought my classical Zionism, he brought his democratic values. And so we blended our causes: babies, fostering children from broken homes, improving the educational system of our economically-depressed town, working toward peace, and promoting the human rights of the neighboring Bedouins.

Like many women of my generation, I awoke to women's issues as a political cause only later. Throughout the seventies, when Marcia Freedman was serving as Israel's only second-wave feminist Member of Knesset (there had been a first-wave representative, Rachel Kagan, in 1949), I did not even notice her. I was then going through other upheavals—the Yom Kippur War, Gush Emunim, anti-government demonstrations, Peace Now, the Likud coming to power, Sadat and the peace with Egypt, the Lebanon war, and so on. For me and my group, it was extraordinary enough to insist that Zionism should switch from militarism to peace, from settling the land so that we can reclaim it to settling among disadvantaged people so that we can make a social difference—throughout all this, women's issues remained invisible.

Then in 1983 I was approached by Baruch Elmakiess, the brilliant Moroccan then running for mayor on the Labor party ticket. He wanted a revolution in Yeruham: power to local leadership. Many Yeruham residents, especially those from Asia and Africa and their descendants, are thought to lack culture—or, at most, to have an inferior culture. Baruch Elmakiess wanted to assume responsibility for his own community and, together with other young Mizrahi leaders, teach the Ashkenazi snobs of the big cities a thing or two about the abilities of the "other Israel." I was flattered to be the only Ashkenazi invited to lead the revolution with them. But then something dawned on me: I was very different from the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of these guys, and their outlook was not feminist. Yet, these young men respected my difference and saw its political effectiveness. They, unlike the established elite, were ready to carve new ways in society. Though they wanted me for my expertise in education, welfare and grassroots social activism, as the first woman in the history of Yeruham to serve on the Town Council, I had an additional responsibility whether they (or I, for that matter) had intended it or not: to promote women's issues.

Everything else followed from this realization. When the time came to elect representatives to the local Religious Council in January 1986, I said, "Include me because I can become Israel's first Religious Councilwoman." They said, "You're crazy, but we'll do it. Why not another revolution? Let's show the world we have more guts than the self-appointed progressives anywhere else." They supported me throughout the long two years and nine months of the Supreme Court battle. The Ministry of Interior Affairs applied pressure and threatened budget cuts to convince them to drop me. But they believed I could be an excellent administrator on the Religious Council, and they had their honor—no one in Jerusalem was going to tell them how to run their affairs in Yeruham. I was not an anonymous woman, I was well known locally. They wanted me, not just any woman, and if the rules of democracy meant that by supporting me they would support all women, so be it. Predictably, the only person who got credit and fame during the course of this battle was I and I alone. None of the other important revolutions in town had merited anybody's attention. The press loved writing about me as the only enlightened creature in a primitive hole—an outrageous lie!

> The dice of leadership were cast a few generations ago; they need to be cast again.

My five years on the Religious Council started on October 25, 1988, and they were a piece of cake! I had worked much harder on the Town Council. Yes, I broke new ground—to date, fourteen women serve or have served on Religious Councils in townships throughout Israel, following the landmark Supreme Court decision on my case. They teach about me in law schools as a cornerstone of equality before the law. They teach about me in Judaic studies as a case of *halakhic* change in modern times. One high-school civics textbook quotes my case in its chapter on the Supreme Court.

But what I really want to teach is a new way of looking at Israeli society in general.

My revolution would not have occurred if I had lived in an established Israeli Jewish township. The impetus had to come from Yeruham, where embittered young Moroccan leaders had the guts to start a second Zionist revolution, a revolution of social power. Their deeds color everything in a different light. Zionism is not a certified, top-down process; it now has to grow from the bottom up, and allow its structures to change accordingly. The dice of leadership were cast a few generations ago; they need to be cast again, with new players, politicians, academics, rabbis, and with women, too. And if we don't have a constitution, maybe that is a good thing, because grand narratives may coagulate too rapidly around the interests of a self-appointed elite, instead of giving voice to the rainbow across our country.

Leah Shakdiel, an educator and activist, was the first woman to serve on an Israeli religious council. She lives in Yeruham.

The essays by Gail Hareven and Leah Shakdiel are excerpted from Zionism the Sequel *edited by Carol Diament (New York: Hadassah, 1998).* *Copyright 1998 Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organzation of America, Gail Hareven and Leah Shakdiel. Essays are reprinted with permission.* *Hareven's originally appeared in Hebrew in* Panim, *January 1997, and was translated by Barbara Harshav.*

might be for the rapist to marry his victim, she works to make the welfare of the victim a priority.

42 **Rachel Ostrowitz** has persevered creatively and gutsily for 20 years as editor of Noga, the only Hebrew-language feminist magazine, published in Tel Aviv with support from US/Israel Women to Women.

43 **Michal Aviad,** a documentary filmmaker, most recently chronicled the lives of adolescent Morroccan working class girls in "Jenny & Jenny."

44 **Dahlia Ravikovitch** a poet whose subjects are love and politics, made it early into the canon of poets studied in school. Her latest book in English is *The Window.*

Women as Religious Leaders

45 **Alice Shalvi,** founder of Israel Women's Network, former head of the Pelech, an experimental Orthodox school of girls, has been appointed rector of the Solomon Schechter Institute (Conservative rabbinical school) in Israel. After a lifetime of feminist leadership, her decision to affiliate with the Conservative movement should have sent a clarion call to Orthodox institutions.

46 **Rabbi Einat Ramon** is the first Israeli-born Conservative woman rabbi. Although she had to come to the US to be ordained, the movement now trains women rabbis in Israel. Concerned with laws of marriage and divorce in Israel, she says, "Potentially every Jewish woman in this country could become an *agunah.*"

47 **Joyce Rosman Brenner**, the first Reform appointee to a local religious council—in Netanya—is a psychotherapist at the feminist Counseling Center for Women. She has worked to make gender and women's studies a specialization in the curriculum for social workers.

48 **Debbie Weissman** directs Kerem, a training institute for humanistic Jewish education, preparing teachers for secular high schools. She was the first president of Jerusalem's groundbreaking egalitarian-as it-gets Orthodox synagogue, Kehilat Yedidya.

49 **Rabbi Naamah Kelman** is the first woman ordained as a Reform rabbi in Israel. She was a founder of the first Progressive (Reform) preschool that grew into an elementary school in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. She coordinates the new Beit Midrash, a liberal yeshiva for postcollege English-speaking students, and directs educational initiatives at Hebrew Union College.

50 **Aviva Zornberg,** the Scottish born, Cambridge educated Orthodox Bible teacher with a worldwide following, teaches traditional religious texts using perspectives from comparative literature and the female experience.

51 **Rabbi Gila Dror** is the first woman president of the Masorti (conservative) Rabbinical Assembly, since 1994. She leads Congregation Eshel Avraham in Beer Sheva. ■

Did you know?

- Most female kibbutz members continue to be employed in education domestic work or public service while most men are employed in agriculture, industry or production management.
- The Government Companies Law of 1975 was amended in 1993 to require equal gender representation in the board of directors of every government corporation; in some cases men were actually asked to resign so that their seats could be given to women!
- Israel has the world's most far-reaching sexual harassment law, passed in 1998 by the Knesset with a vote of 18-1. The new law deals not only with the workplace but also forbids sexual harassment in the school, in the army, and on the street.
- In 1998 Israel elected its first female mayor of a city, Miriam Fireburg (Likud) of Netanya.
- And some foremothers: **Rosa Welt-Straus** (1858-1938), was chairperson of the "Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Yisrael," which in 1926 won the right for women to vote and be elected to the governing body representing the Jews in pre-State Israel. **Rachel Kagan** signed Israel's Declaration of Independence; the only other woman to sign was Golda Meir. She was a member of the first Knesset, representing the women's party, and introduced the first bill addressing women's equality—but did not vote for the final legislation because it exempted marriage and divorce laws from the rule of equality.

Here are two opportunities to read more of LILITH's unique, illuminating writing on women in Israel

1. A packet of original articles from LILITH, including hidden lives of Ethiopian women in Israel, the woman who invented the kibbutz, study opportunities in Israel, fresh fiction and much, much more. **Order "Women in Israel" for $12.**
This collection is made possible with the generous support of Mildred and George Weissman and the Weissman Family Foundation.

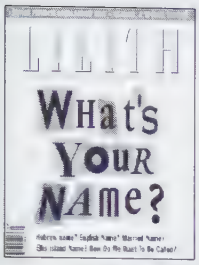
2. "In Praise of Famous Women: A Walking Tour of Jerusalem." Here we beat a path to the doors of 16 important Jewish women (complete with maps!). There are plenty of pilgrimages to the Holy Land, but none that focus on females—until now! **Order "Jerusalem Women Walking Tour" for $6**

Call toll-free **1-888-2-LILITH**.

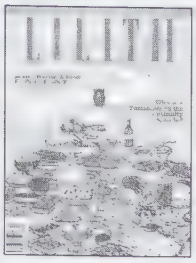
Help us clean out our closet!

Fill the gaps in your personal LILITH magazine collection

(Order any 3 back issues of LILITH and we'll send you a fourth FREE!)



Winter 1996 (#53)
- Jewish Feminist Scholarship
- Healing—A Special Section: Disability Becomes Understanding, Resentment Becomes Love
- What's Your Name?

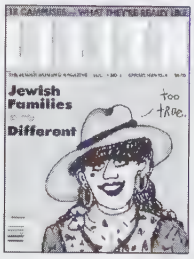


Summer 1995 (#47)
- Jewish Women & Food: EAT, EAT. (Diet! Diet!) What Makes Us Different?
- Identity and Anxiety: Feminism and Jewish Continuity

Fall 1992 (#37)
- Yaffa Eliach's Portraits from Pre-War Poland
- Lesbian Wedding: Reconciliations Under an Unusual Chuppah
- Jewish Feminist Politicians Tell What Shaped Them

Fall 1996 (#52)
- A Modern Idenity Crisis: Black or Jewish?
- 20th Anniversary Poster
- Feminists Examine Jewish Children's Books

Fall 1994 (#44)
LILITH's Famous 18th Anniversary Issue!
- Notable Jewish Feminists Tell How They Got to Be This Way
- Young Women to Watch During the Next 18 years
- Bat Mitzvah in Boomer Families



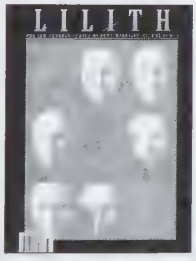
Spring 1989 (#23)
- Jewish Families *Are* Different! Here, Some Reasons Why
- 18 Campuses–What They're Really Like
- Etty Hillesum: From Amsterdam to Auschwitz

Summer 1996 (#51)
- Making Space Sacred
- Fiction: Three Special Stories About Love & Loss—and Men Who Inspire Both
- Medieval Women Had to Choose: Sex or Scholarship?

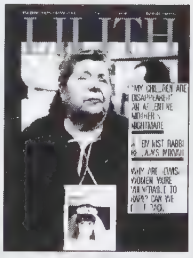
Summer 1994 (#43)
- INmarriage: The New Minority—Jews Who Choose Jews!
- Counselor Alert! Amazing Programming for Summer Camp
- Jewish Women's Faces around the World: Photographs by Joan Roth

Winter 1989 (#22)
- When a Feminist Therapist Confronts Her Own Jewish Identity
- Women's Mideast Peace Efforts
- Our Radical Jewish Foremothers and How They Changed America

Spring 1996 #(50)
- A New Jewish Population Statistic: Single Mothers—by Choice !
- Abortion—Fiction, Fact and Political Bedfellows
- Teen Girl Angst in the 1950's, 60's, 80's and Today



Fall 1993 (#41)
- Feminist Philanthropy: Women Changing the World with Their Dollars
- Goddess Cults and Jewish Women
- Palestinian Women Who Are Making Peace



Summer 1986 (#15)
- Why Are Jewish Women More Vulnerable to Rape?
- My Children Are Disappeared—An Argentine Mother's Nightmare
- A Woman Rabbi Reclaims Mikveh

Winter 1995 (#49)
- Gender-Bending in Yiddish Film
- The Current Explosion of Jewish Women's Music
- A New Blessing for Your Wedding

Spring 1993 (#39)
- Gentiles and Jews at the Hop: Why High School Reunions Trigger Such a Tingle
- Out of Africa: An Ethiopian Jewish Woman's Exodus
- Gender Politics at Summer Camp

Fall/Winter 1985/6 (#14)
- Annie Oakley's Pals: How the Wild West Liberated Jewish Women
- Breaking the Male Monopoly of Jewish Community Leadership
- The First Conservative Woman Rabbi

BACK ISSUES:

☐ #53 ☐ #47 ☐ #37

☐ #52 ☐ #44 ☐ #23

☐ #51 ☐ #43 ☐ #22

☐ #50 ☐ #41 ☐ #15

☐ #49 ☐ #39 ☐ #14

Terrific! Please send me all the issues I have checked at left.

(I understand that when I order any 3 back issues I receive a fourth back issue FREE.)

I want_____magazines @ $4 each.

Total payment of $_____

☐ My check is enclosed.

☐ Please charge my ____AMEX ____ MC ____VISA

#_____

Expiration date_____

Signature_____

My name_____

Address_____

_____

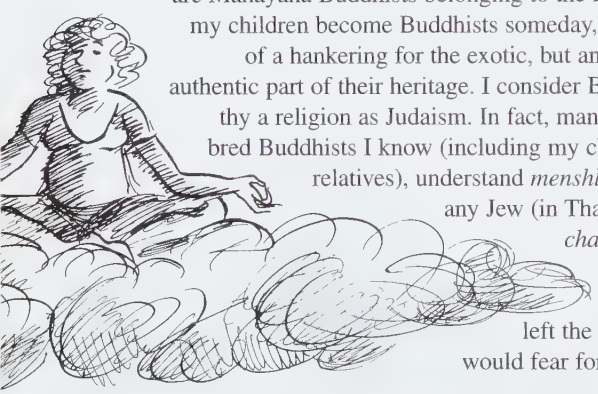
Please mail this form to:
LILITH, 250 W. 57th Street, #2432, New York, NY 10107-0172, or fax (212)757-5705, or send e-mail to lilithmag@aol.com with your credit card information. You can also place a telephone order toll free with a credit card: (888) 2-LILITH (545484).

Thanks for helping us CLEAN OUT THE CLOSET!

An Open Letter to Buddhist Jews

BY MICHELE KRIEGMAN

I've been writing mental drafts of this letter ever since my estranged husband gave our youngest daughter a stone Buddha and told her to pray to it every day. Was this odd of him? No. Just spiteful. Although we had agreed to raise our children Jewish, he and his siblings are natives of Thailand, where the state religion is Theravada Buddhism. We met and were married in Japan, where most of the population are Mahayana Buddhists belonging to the Pure Land sect. If my children become Buddhists someday, it will not be out of a hankering for the exotic, but an embracing of an authentic part of their heritage. I consider Buddhism as worthy a religion as Judaism. In fact, many of the born and bred Buddhists I know (including my children's paternal relatives), understand *menshlichkeit* as well as any Jew (in Thai it's called *nam-chai*, in Japanese it's called *omoiyari*). But if my kids left the People of Israel I would fear for their very souls.



This is because of an impression I received time and again in my twenties during travels in northeast and southeast Asia:

The most selfish, isolated people in the world are Westerners who leave their own religion to adopt Buddhism. At the time I could not explain why Buddhism, a religion that teaches Selflessness and extinguishing the ego, seemed to have this effect on its Western proselytes (but not its native-born followers). Now I think I know why.

The explanation lies with the major difference between Buddhism and Judaism. That crucial difference is not the one to which theologians often point: that the ultimate center in monotheism is God, whereas the ultimate center in Buddhism is Nothingness (although Jewish mystics might not draw as clear a distinction as this when they refer to God as *ein sof*, or "that without end"). No, the real difference between Buddhism and Judaism is down here on the ground amidst the pettiness and practicality of fundraising and committee meetings and carpools. Judaism (like her daughter religions, Christianity and Islam) is a congregational religion whereas Buddhism is not.

The congregation is the heart of the matter. Western individualism needs to be tempered by a congregation, just as the individual-centered spirituality of Buddhism needs to be tempered (as it is actually in every Buddhist country in the world) by either Confucianism or local animistic religions. It is Buddhism's "partner religions" that teach the relationship ethics like loyalty, self-sacrifice and civic responsibility that the otherworldly privacy of a Buddhist path can neglect. In both Japan and Korea, the average Buddhist practitioner intermingles the group-oriented teachings and holidays of both Confucius and the local shaman-priest with his or her Buddhism in a way that Jewish converts to Buddhism do not. In Thailand, families make daily offerings to both their private Buddhist alter and to their "spirit house" said to provide shelter to the community's spirits. This is how East Asians find a balance between self-absorbed spirituality and its noisy partner, team-spirit. Buddhism alone does not provide the balance.

A Jewish Influence on Buddhism?

Interestingly, Western converts to Buddhism, many of them Jews, have shifted the worldwide emphasis in Buddhism from rejection of this world to something called "engaged Buddhism." Engaged Buddhism encourages "bearing witness" to the suffering of the world by visiting sites like Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Nanjing, or sites of ecological devastation. But bearing witness falls far short of giving actual physical relief to the victims of suffering in the way that Christian and Jewish liberation theology encourages.

A Buddhist might argue that I've missed the point. One of the teachings of Buddhism is that this life is about suffering and, thus, that letting go of the ideal of social change or messianic utopianism is one of the prerequisites to accepting the *dharma* of suffering. In answer to this, I reply that Buddha taught compassion for all living things. Bearing witness is only a way of expressing sympathy, not acting with compassion, or in Hebrew, *chesed*. You need to be part of a community to practice compassion. You can find community in a multi-generational family that practices Confucianism or a village that practices animism, but not in Buddhism alone. Judaism provides both spiritual teachings, and (for better and for worse), the messy human community called the congregation in which we must practice what we preach.

EXOTICA

I exempt my children from the next message of this letter: I believe that some Bu-Jews (who, unlike my kids, do not have a Buddhist parent) are attracted to Buddhism because it is exotic. I, too, have been guilty of pursuing the great Other (in other ways). My temperament loves surprise, the new, the unusual and I will always believe curiosity is a virtue. But I have learned, as you will have to learn for yourself (so don't take my word for it), that the Other is only a way-station on the path to self-discovery and communal discovery. In fact, if you are honest, the exotic becomes a delay or even an escape from true discovery.

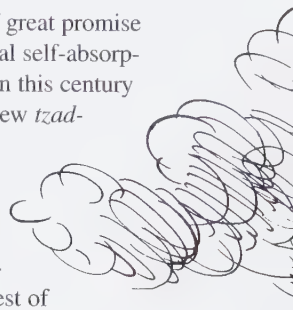
This is a shame because many of the "exotic" practices that draw Jews to Buddhism can be found in our own tradition. However, they are not mainstream and you may have to go a little further to find the right teacher and the right Jewish community. Don't make the mistake my friend Jerry did. He complained that the Hebrew used in prayer was so difficult that it made him feel alienated from the service. So what did he do? He decided to seek out a Buddhist teacher who has him reciting the Buddhist *sutras*, which are Sanskrit syllables neither Jerry nor his teacher understand. Go figure.

An example of what I mean by an "exotic" practice that is also an authentic part of our own tradition is meditation. Some congregational rabbis and Jewish retreat leaders have begun re-introducing meditation into daily and Sabbath prayer because, although it had fallen into disuse, it is an authentic form of Jewish prayer. There is evidence that some standard prayers like the *Amidah* were once recited as mantras for meditation. Both *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide* by Aryeh Kaplan (Schocken Books, 1989), and *Renewing Your Soul: A Guided Retreat for the Sabbath and Other Days of Rest* by David A. Cooper (HarperSan Francisco, 1995) serve as good, informed introductions to meditation.

There is a rebirth in the dissemination and study of Jewish mysticism, *kabbalah*. It uses mandalas, such as the ten *sefirot*, to help explain reality. It is even said that the star of David originated as a kabbalistic mandala. Many of the teachings of Maimonides, in his *Mishneh Torah*, offer advice on finding internal peace and personal growth, much as a Buddhist teacher would.

One of the most important ideals that you can find in Judaism owes its re-emphasis to the large number of Jews who have studied Buddhism or other Eastern disciplines and returned to the Congregation. English-speaking Buddhists call that ideal "mindfulness" while in Hebrew it is traditionally called *kavannah*. Performing something with *kavannah*, or mindful intent, means doing it with spirituality, with piety, with sincere devotion.

The People of Israel, your congregation, loses much when it loses some of its most sensitive spiritual seekers to Buddhism. But I believe that you, too, lose out. You lose the chance to be engaged in a religion that is facing its most pivotal century now. While the watersheds of most of the world religions happened centuries ago, two of the landmarks of Jewish history, the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel, have happened in the twentieth century.



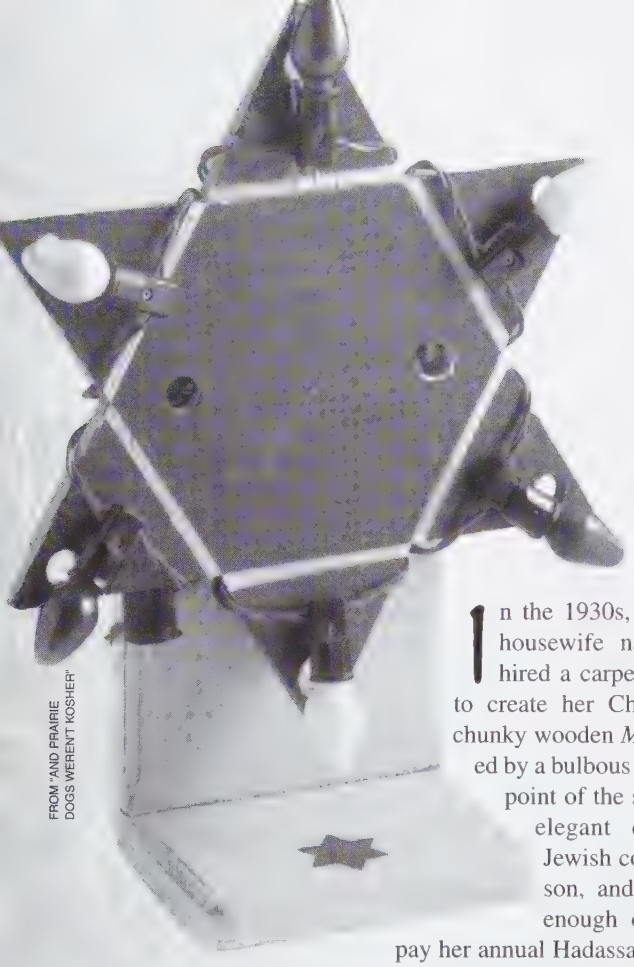
This means your people is enjoying a time of great promise while suffering great pain. Let go of egotistical self-absorption and think about this: perhaps no people in this century are in greater need of what are called in Hebrew *tzaddikim* or in Sanskrit, *boddhisatvas*, than your own. *Boddhisatvas*, in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, were saintly people nearing the final stage of Enlightenment or *nirvana*, who temporarily forsook their own personal spiritual salvation in order to help the rest of their community first. I hope that, perhaps, some Jews who have studied Buddhism return to the Jewish community, like *boddhisatvas*, to share their insights. By this I do not mean proselytizing. Just as Jews for Jesus is not really Judaism, Buddhist *yiddishkeit* is not Judaism, either. What I do mean are Jews who can confront modern Jewish institutions over their lacks: their lack of emphasis on our meditative tradition; their lack of emphasis on the mystical tradition; their lack of emphasis on *kavannah*.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE . . .

As Hillel said, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" I think of those words when I think of the brilliant, beautiful Jews who have shorn themselves of their Jewish community to pursue a more solitary search for spiritual answers. Hillel's criticism, though, could also be leveled at non-Buddhist Jews who are simply unaffiliated. It could even be leveled at some manifestation of the Jewish Renewal Movement (which should claim most of the credit for intelligent Jewish response to Buddhism). After all, it was Arthur Waskow himself in *Godwrestling/Round II* who quotes his kids' criticism of the movement for its lack of continuity, i.e., the adults' emphasis on the adults' interests exclusively.

Why is there such a tendency by many Jews to drift from the congregation? Everyone has their explanations. But in the end, to do what needs to be done, to raise a child, to bury our dead, to support our people when they are in distress spiritually, physically and (here's where those annoying High Holy Day fundraising appeals come in) financially, in short, to practice our personal spirituality where it really counts, it "takes a village." In the modern world, the Jewish congregation provides that village in the earthy, imperfect way that a Buddhist monastery or retreat cannot. ■

Michele Kriegman is a freelance writer at work on a book called Orphans, Adoptees & Test-Tube Babies.
Illustrations by Julie Flather-Zeitlin.



FROM "AND PRAIRIE DOGS WEREN'T KOSHER"

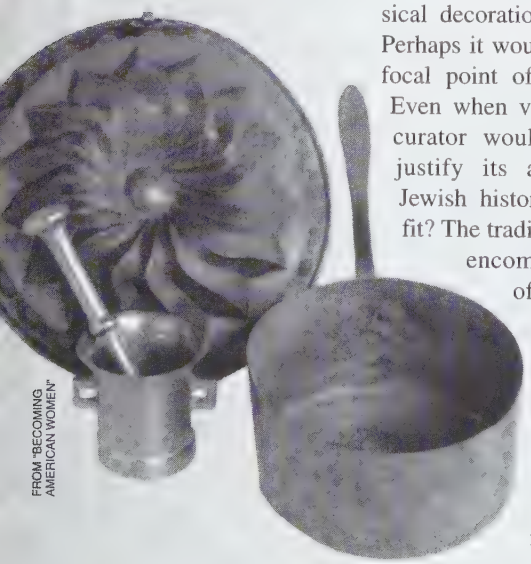
How Museums Invent Us

BY CAROLYN FEIBEL

In the 1930s, a Minneapolis Jewish housewife named Bessie Furman hired a carpenter and an electrician to create her Chanukah brainstorm: a chunky wooden *Magen David* illuminated by a bulbous Christmas light at each point of the star. It wasn't the most elegant design, but it gave Jewish color to the holiday season, and she was able to sell enough of them to friends to pay her annual Hadassah pledge.

Bessie's humble creation, now a piece of Jewish American folk art, is one of the artifacts in an exhibit entitled "Unpacking on the Prairie: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest," which first showed at the Minnesota Historical Society in 1996 and is now traveling around the country. Historian and curator Linda Mack Schloff's decision to include the *Magen David* in the exhibit signals the eagerness of museum curators to expand the definition of what, exactly, constitutes "Jewish art."

FEMINIST CURATORS HAVE TURNED JOKES, TOYS, TOOLS AND CLOTHING INTO "HISTORY" AND "ART."



FROM "BECOMING AMERICAN WOMEN"

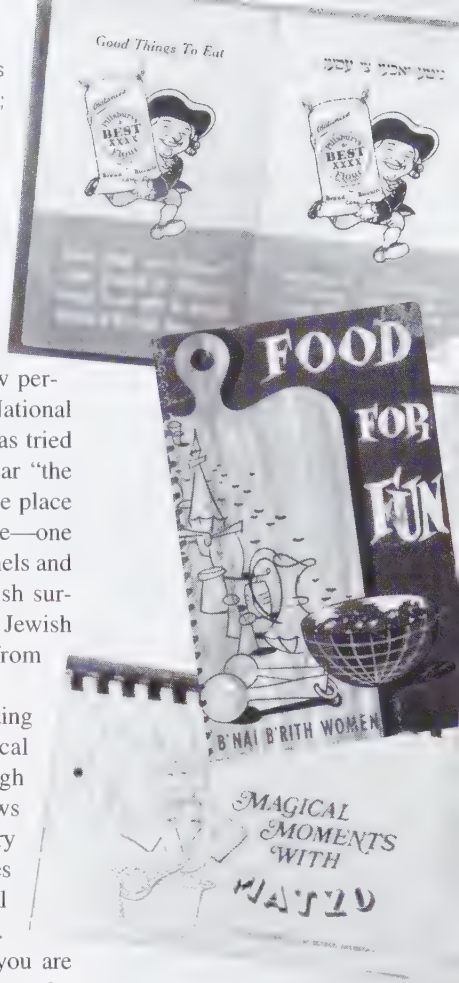
If this were thirty years ago, Bessie's whimsical decoration would not be in a museum. Perhaps it would be a family curio, the annual focal point of holiday jokes and memories. Even when viewed as a historical artifact, a curator would have been hard-pressed to justify its addition to an exhibition of Jewish history. Where would this *tchochke* fit? The traditional story of the Jewish people encompassed the sweeping stories of Diaspora, Zion, and the Holocaust, and was peopled by kings, warriors, politicians, prophets, martyrs and writers. The creative pluck of a suburban Jewish wife didn't have a place in that epic drama.

Feminism and other activism has changed all that. The women's rights movement, the civil rights movement and the upsurge of a "culture of redress" challenged fields like anthropology and history to rethink the assumptions that had created them. "As history rethought itself, there came with it a new form of museum practice to match it," explains Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, professor of Performance Studies and Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. Over the past 30 years, museum holdings have become more inclusive of alternative cultures and perspectives, and the curator, who used to spend much time managing collections, began spending more time on exhibitions, which are the "primary way you reach the visitor," according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

Today, curators—including many Jewish women—are exploring alternative sources of history once regarded as ephemeral and inconsequential: family stories, jokes, toys, tools, posters, clothing and even recipes. The resulting exhibitions, such as a 1994 survey of immigrant Jewish women's clothing at the Chicago Historical Society, "Becoming American Women," or the Cooper-Hewitt Museum's 1993 "Mechanical Brides," herald a new era in museology. They are also extremely popular.

Jewish museums have always struggled against the popular impression that the "People of the Book" don't possess a material culture: that is, ordinary objects and the paintings, sculptures and other "high art" produced within a particular cultural context. Jews are better known for their textual productions: the Torah, Talmud, and folktales, novels and songs.

Ellen Smith, curator at the American Jewish Historical Society, finds that perception ludicrous: "The second commandment—'thou shalt have no graven images'—does not mean 'thou shalt have no material culture'! Jews have tons of



Good Things To Eat, Pillsbury's Yiddish-English cook-booklet, mid 1930s, from *"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher."*

Food for Fun by B'nai B'rith Women, from "Creating American Jews" and *Magical Moments with Matzo*, Scopus chapter of Hadassah, Minneapolis, from *"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher."*

'material culture,' we've just never been taught it. This stuff, Jewish *stuff*, counts too."

But many Jews find it difficult to imagine a material culture beyond ceremonial art. We all know the ornate silver *kiddush* cups and bejeweled Torah mantles standing untouched in forgotten synagogue display cases. But ceremonial art tells only part of the Jewish story.

"It used to be that only if something was exquisite, precious and rare was it important," says Susan Youdovin, curator of education at the Spertus Museum. "We understand now that what may be more important are things that we may have overlooked, the things we use every day, every week, that influence the way we act and think."

Jewish museum curators are expanding their collections, incorporating what Smith calls "petty or lesser or forgotten objects," including bat mitzvah centerpieces and Rosh Hashanah postcards, slick mass-produced souvenirs and clumsy handmade crafts. These objects are "forgotten" no more. They allow curators to ask better questions, to incorporate the voices of women, children and other once-marginalized Jews into the "big picture." The question in Jewish history is no longer "What happened?" but rather "Who are we?" and "Where are we going?"

Jewish women have a particularly close connection to objects. Historically barred from the abstract world of Torah and Talmud, traditional women developed a pride in the hands-on nature of what was "women's Judaism"—keeping kosher and preparing the home for holidays. During the mass emigration from the Russian Pale in the 1880s it was the mothers who carried the *peklakh* (bundles) containing candlesticks and hand-embroidered challah covers, samovars and family photographs. As she dismantled her home for immigration to America, the Jewish woman literally *chose with her hands* the household objects that best represented the identity and commitments of her family, wherever they might settle in the New World.

How many American Jewish women have found hidden in their attics another generation's candlesticks in need of polishing or a family photograph with the penciled names fading? How many have felt the thrill of reconnection as they put their grandmother's challah cover back into use? Elevating forgotten objects to heirloom status, we, like curators, affirm the importance of small actions and choices to the direction of Jewish life.

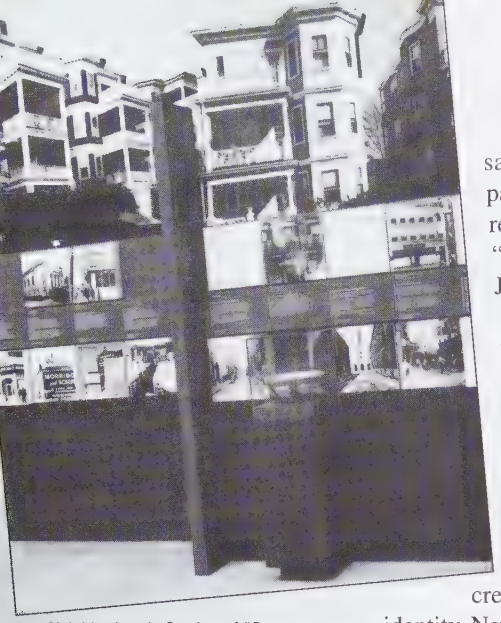
Permanent exhibitions everywhere are being overhauled to give attention to the multiple voices and narratives that have made up Jewish history. Karen Mittelman, the curator of the new permanent exhibition at Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History, has tried to avoid the effect in which visitors hear "the museum speaking from the walls." In the place of an authoritarian, disembodied voice—one that describes sacred customs on text panels and admonishes the visitor to fight for Jewish survival—she composed a symphony of Jewish voices, using quotes and excerpts from diaries, letters and oral histories.

The new exhibition, entitled "Creating American Jews," eschews the typical chronological march through famous events, "great" Jews and historic dates. This story focuses instead on "the choices that make up an individual identity," says Mittelman. "The choice whether you are going to keep kosher on the frontier, or whether, in the 1950s, you are going to let your kids sing Christmas carols in school—these aren't monumental choices. They are decisions made in the living room or kitchen, but when you add up all these choices, they shape who we have become as a people."

Women frequently made those "kitchen decisions," and their choices shaped the nature of Jewish belief, practice and community. Schloff, curator of "Unpacking on the Prairie," argues that in the early American Midwest the lack of a Jewish "infrastructure" of rabbis and institutions meant that women had an enormous role in determining the direction of Jewish life, a role that was "more important perhaps, than in New York City." Schloff's exhibit shows that even an "ordinary" Sisterhood cookbook, for example, is a significant historical document. Reform temples put out "*treif* cookbooks" that subtly announced the communal decision to abandon kosher rules. Many cookbooks incorporated recipes borrowed from Finnish neighbors, or recipes for blueberries, a regional staple fruit. Evidence of increasing assimilation? Not so fast,

SKIRBALL CULTURAL CENTER

Center: Dress, 1945, made by Frania Bratt at the newly-liberated Dachau concentration camp, using fabric supplied by the U.S. army. Gift of Frania Bratt Blum. Photograph by Peter Goldberg. Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York.



Neighborhoods Section of "On Common Ground: The Boston Jewish Experience 1649-1980."

says Schloff. Later cookbooks, packed with Israeli and Sephardic recipes, proudly heralded the era of "kitchen Zionism" for Midwestern Jewish women.

Innovative Chanukah decorations, like "Maccabee" cookie cutters or Bessie Furman's electrified *Magen David,* do more than record the Americanization of Jews. According to Schloff, they reflect the tactics mothers used to make being Jewish attractive to their children and the compromises and creativity involved in forging a new identity. New exhibits teach us that Jewish identity isn't merely a result of rabbinic debate and institutional change, but is also a product of the home, hearth and our mothers' hands.

"You can't just have a neutral shoe. There is a *person*, a foot that belonged to that shoe."

Visitors love stories, and museums have seized on the power of narrative to transform their exhibitions. With stories, curators bring objects to life and give history a fullness and presence it lacked in earlier exhibits. Curators spend more time recording oral histories connected to personal objects and seeking out documents that may reveal a hidden fact about an object's existence. When an object is reunited with its story, its charisma and persuasiveness are magnified.

"The fact that an artifact was really *there* is very meaningful to people in both an emotional and intellectual way," says Margo Bloom, the director of the National Museum of American Jewish History.

The Skirball Cultural Center, in Los Angeles, recently added an 1897 Jewish bridal dress from Decatur, Illinois, to its collection. Grace Cohen Grossman, the Judaica curator, says her team felt "very fortunate to have a photo of the bride in her gown, *and* the *ketubah*, *and* a wedding present. We were able to talk to the granddaughter of the bride, who also had a newspaper article about the wedding."

At New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, artifacts are paired whenever possible with a photograph of the owner or a quote from a letter, diary, or even an interview (if he or she survived). Curator Ellen Smith praises the new museum for forging a "wonderful reassociation of humans and their objects," which creates an "overpowering livingness," even in a Holocaust museum.

One artifact, a tiny baby's shoe, vividly illustrates the emotional stress family members felt when they separated during their escape from Germany. According to the exhibition text, the shoe was originally worn by Irene Katzenstein, who was sent to Britain along with other Jewish children on one of the last *kindertransports*. Though Irene's mother joined her later, her father could not get a visa and instead fled to South America, taking the single shoe as a reminder of his love for his daughter far away. The story and accompanying photograph animate the shoe far better than a conventional text panel, which might have read "Shoe worn by girl before boarding a *kindertransport*."

"You can't just have a neutral shoe. There is a *person*, a foot that belonged to that shoe," Smith emphasizes. "The breakthrough is the insistence that people never get lost from their stories. . . . I hope 'forever after' that museums will put that object back with the person."

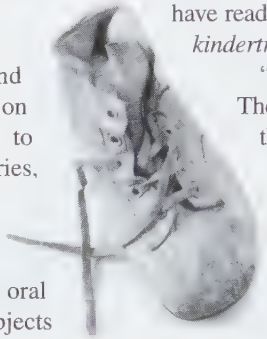
While developing "Creating American Jews" in Philadelphia, Karen Mittelman also sought to tap the compact eloquence of narrative. The entire exhibit takes the form of an oral history. "We started with the idea that an exhibit should unfold the way a story unfolds. If your grandmother tells you a story about her life, she doesn't go from beginning to end. She jumps around, she wanders, she stops, she starts, she gives you details about her life." Likewise, the new exhibit has four starting points, not one, and travels both forward and backward in time.

Mittelman admits that the innovative layout challenged established ideas of what a history museum should be. "We were trying to shake up the traditional chronological overview" of a historical exhibit, Mittelman recalls. "Many of us on the project team were at first skeptical about this design idea." So she went to a board meeting armed with her metaphor of the tale-spinning grandmother. "I asked them to think about how their grandmothers talked to them . . ." And the board members accepted the plan.

Why do people gravitate toward local stories and personal anecdotes? Stories, for one, are easier to remember than "textbook style" panels. Many visitors also feel a greater resonance with

"You can't just have a neutral shoe. There is a person, a foot that belonged to that shoe."

Advertising sign, Philadelphia, ca. 1910; Wedding Slippers of Belle Simon, New York, 1779. Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia, from "Creating American Jews."



Center: Baby shoe of Irene Katzenstein. Photograph by Peter Goldberg. Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York.

Center: Ashtray, "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's."
Right: Wedding Fan of Belle Simon, New York, 1779. Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia.
Both from "Creating American Jews."

regular people than famous Jewish heroes or celebrities. Susan Youdovin calls stories "the ultimate Jewish tradition, the *aggadic* or *midrashic* as opposed to the *halachic*. Jews have been telling and retelling them, interpreting and reinterpreting them for ages. That's the Talmud. Sure, it gets codified and even fossilized in legal jargon, but stories are the kernel. That may seem controversial, because to some Judaism is about the law."

Controversial or not, the new exhibit designs have been drawing in the crowds and even moving people to tears. The trend began in earnest in 1980, when Ellen Smith had a late-night vision: Using recorded voices and programmed lighting, she would allow the museum visitor to spy on a "Sabbath kitchen," to eavesdrop on the bustle of the grandmother preparing food, the mother telling the children to wash, and the saying of prayers around the table as the candles lit up.

At that innovative show, "On Common Ground: The Boston Jewish Experience, 1649 to 1980" at the American Jewish Historical Society, visitors stood entranced before the empty recreated kitchen, listening to the four-minute tape over and over, hearing the Sabbath quiet descend on the crowded household again and again. They reported that the auditory story evoked powerful personal memories of Shabbat and childhood.

Over the last two decades, Smith has consulted with many museums seeking to elaborate on or imitate the "Sabbath kitchen" design or create their own microcosms of Jewish life. The Jewish Museum's 1990 exhibit, "Getting Comfortable in New York," used a whole series of Jewish "period rooms," including a tenement kitchen and a suburban recreation room from the 1950s. Jenna Weissman Joselit, the guest curator, recalls that the attempt to be both "playful and critical" was a success with audiences.

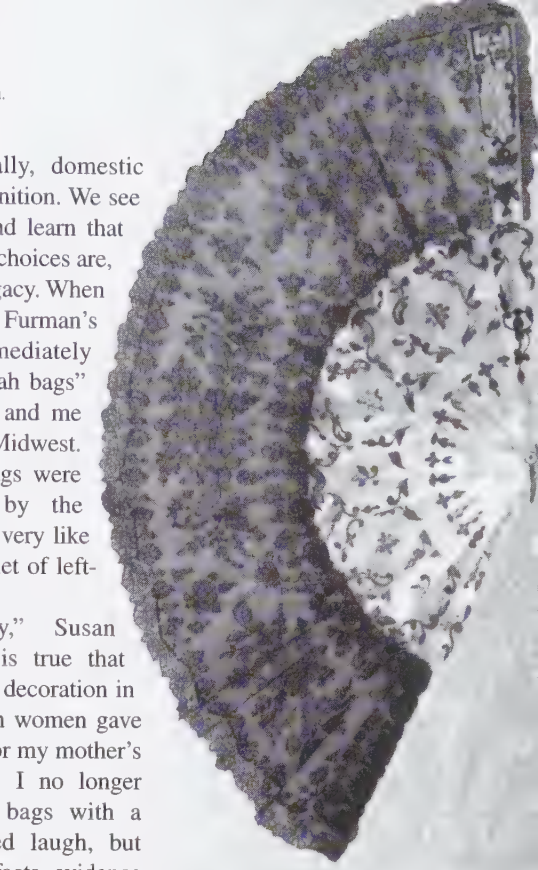
Visitors respond to "period rooms" and domestic objects on many levels: the visceral, the emotional, the personal, the spiritual. Though museums have always displayed objects, older methods of museology risked alienating the visitor with only academic facts on the wall panels. Now, objects can elicit empathy and create a Jewish "past" that can be partially touched, smelled, listened to and looked at.

For Jewish women, especially, domestic objects can bring a thrill of recognition. We see ourselves in the new exhibits, and learn that our humble belongings and small choices are, indeed, part of the great Jewish legacy. When I first saw a picture of Bessie Furman's Chanukah decoration, I immediately remembered the square "Chanukah bags" my mother sewed for my sister and me when we were growing up in the Midwest. According to my mother, the bags were filled with toys each year by the "Chanukah fairy," a tiny creature very like the tooth fairy who preferred a diet of leftover latke bits and applesauce.

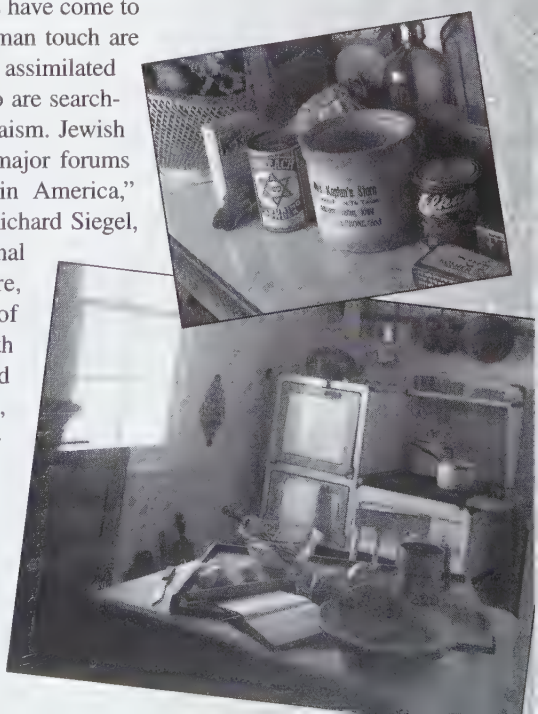
"Objects validate memory," Susan Youdovin has written. And it is true that Schloff's decision to use Bessie's decoration in the exhibit on Midwestern Jewish women gave me a historical context for my mother's Chanukah bags. I no longer remember the bags with a half-embarrassed laugh, but see them as artifacts, evidence of my mother's successful struggle to keep her kids happily Jewish when Christmas rolled over St. Louis like a juggernaut.

"I never realized I was part of history, too," a woman told Joselit after donating an object to her show. "I loved hearing that," the curator relates. The comment conveyed the empowering sense "of being a part of something larger than yourself, especially when the object is smaller—a hat or a pin or a pot."

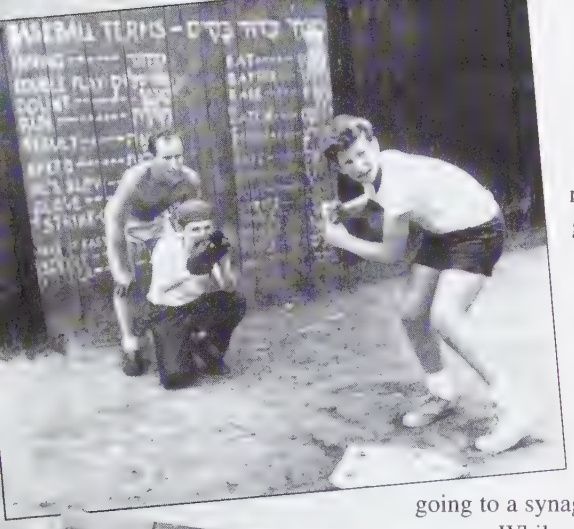
In this regard, Jewish museums have come to recognize that exhibits with a human touch are often powerful tools for reaching assimilated or unaffiliated Jewish visitors who are searching for a way to reconnect to Judaism. Jewish museums have emerged as "the major forums for informal Jewish education in America," according to a recent article by Richard Siegel, executive director of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, which created the Council of American Jewish Museums. With their increasingly sophisticated and attractive lectures, films, tours, classes and other cultural programs, Jewish museums actively court their visitors. According to Siegel, the museums represent nothing less than "a new breed of American Jewish institution."



"BUT I'M NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THE CELEBRATION OF THE JEWISH WOMAN AS HOMEMAKER," ONE CURATOR SAYS.



Project Americana—household goods and kitchen, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles.



Center: *The Jewish Catalog*, 1973, from the exhibit "Creating American Jews."

While visiting a museum is not the same as attending religious services, exhibits can offer a "nonprescriptive setting to learn about Jewishness," according to Margo Bloom, the director of the National Museum of American Jewish History. "Museums can be perceived as less threatening than going to a synagogue."

Playing baseball in Hebrew (Massad Hebrew Camps); *Tzion*, wooden Maccabiah plaque (Cejwin Camps). From the exhibit "A Worthy Use of Summer; Jewish Summer Camping in America."

While curators are pleased with the enthusiastic reception of many new exhibitions, they want to do more than feed audiences hungry for nostalgia and validation. When Joselit curated "A Worthy Use of Summer," a show on Jewish summer camps, many visitors were upset that their particular camp wasn't mentioned. "If you're dealing with people's history, they feel just as knowledgeable. It's their history, after all," she says. "Folks come looking for themselves, and if it's not there or there in the form they want it to be, then they're not happy. You try to balance, and hopefully you satisfy some of them." The challenge for curators is to attract visitors through personal connections, memories and feelings, but the final goal is to educate them and expand their perspectives.

Dancing Day Goblet, Yael Brotman. From the exhibit "Miriam's Cups" by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project.

In 1977 there were seven founding members in the Council of American Jewish Museums. Now almost sixty museums are represented in the professional organization. The recent success of the U.S. National Holocaust Memorial Museum, says Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "has brought to the attention of the ordinary person what a museum can be and can do."

The Jewish museum in America has proven itself able to grapple with issues of identity, memory and community in sophisticated and appealing forums. A museum visit can also be a transformative experience, although not in the narrow (and hard to measure) moral sense. Rather, museums can change the way Jews look at their own homes and family histories, and their modes of worship and ritual.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls this the "museum effect." "Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings," she writes in her new book, *Destination Culture*, "but the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls."

The *heimische* approach to museum exhibitions has its feminist detractors, though. Laura Kruger, a freelance curator for Jewish and secular museums, says, "I'm not comfortable with [these shows], with the celebration of the Jewish woman as homemaker." The shows evoke negative, rather than positive, memories of the home for Kruger. "I was brought up in a time when women were not encouraged or expected to be equal or excellent in things other than domestic. The domesticity of women was paramount even in enlightened or educated households. Women were expected to be excellent but not outside of their own family. They were not usually encouraged to be doctors and lawyers."

But enterprising curators have shown us that through museums we can change our visions of ourselves. And—as a recent New York show demonstrated—they also have the power to change the way in which we live our lives. The exhibit, inspired by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project and entitled "Miriam's Cups," invited artists to *create* a ritual cup in honor of Miriam to be used alongside the Cup of Elijah at the Passover seder. All the cups were for sale, and most—while elaborately designed—could be put to actual use. The show offered a vision of how innovative curating might "talk back" to the home, inspiring women to make feminist changes even in their familiar objects and rituals.

And so the dialogue between women and museums continues. One day a Jewish woman walked through Ellen Smith's office door at the American Jewish Historical Society with a *kiddush* cup in her hands, a "typical mass-produced kiddush cup that your *bubbe* and *zayde* had on their table and brought over from Russia." Smith, thrilled by the unsolicited donation, asked the woman why she was giving it to the Society. "My children don't want it or understand it," the woman replied.

"That clarified for me why I'm in this business," Smith confides. "Not because I want four hundred more of those cups, but because I want people to appreciate and pass them on, to learn and record the stories about the objects for their own family history, so their children will want to keep them as well." ■

Carolyn Feibel is a freelance writer living in Brooklyn, New York.

EGON SCHIELE. *NUDE ON COLORED FABRIC*. 1911. WATERCOLOR AND PENCIL. PRIVATE COLLECTION, COURTESY GALERIE ST. ETIENNE, NEW YORK

Objects of Desire

BY CAROL BERGMAN

There was a child went forth that day

And the first object he looked upon, that object he became

And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day

Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

—Walt Whitman, "There was a Child Went Forth"

A Friday night, 1953. I am eight years old and being delivered, like a bag of groceries, to my father's apartment. My mother rings the bell, releases my hand. Be good, she says, pushing me over the door jamb.

Inside the apartment on the couch, an odalisque, the woman with red hair, my father's second wife, and the paintings clutching the walls, like bugs.

How does my father greet me? Usually with a pat of his hand somewhere between my neck and angel wing. *Wie gehts*, how are you, he asks. He does not expect a reply.

After dinner, which takes several hours because my father and his wife are so particular about how they lay out the table and prepare the food, my father takes me on a tour of the apartment. He's bought two new paintings and he wants to show them to me. This is instead of a bedtime story or listening to music on the radio. In the living room above the couch where I will be sleeping is a small watercolor, poppy flowers against a black background. This is by Emil Nolde, a German Expressionist, my father explains, and it is very precious because it was painted during the war, hidden so Hitler could not find it, "an unpainted picture," and only recently discovered.

My father has been telling me stories about his paintings since I have been very small. Now I am older and I require fuller stories, deeper explanations. How can a picture be unpainted, I ask.

Nolde painted in secret, my father explains, patiently. The paintings were visible only to him and to his wife in the farmhouse where they lived during the war. He called them unpainted as a joke because he was German to the marrow and very bitter that the Führer would not allow him to display his work.

German to the marrow. What does this mean? A marrow is the center of the chicken bone I suck and bite. It is full of iron, my mother says. But when I ask the meaning of the expression, my father does not answer my question. Come, look at the painting, he says. It is a masterpiece, *nicht*?

I am taller and my father does not have to lift me up to see. If I stand back I can see well enough. The blossoms of the poppies are red and purple, enormous washes of color filling the frame. Yes, it is very magnificent, I say. Then my father puts his arm around my shoulders and we stand there for a while looking at the beautiful painting.

Now we're in the bedroom where I never venture unless I am invited, and above the dresser where there used to be a mirror is a painting of a man lying on top of a woman. Both the man and the woman are looking at me with mask-like faces. The man's hands are in the woman's red hair and his hips are in the air and the woman's knee is splayed out in a strange position. I am waiting for my father to tell a story about this painting but all he says is, "It's an Egon Schiele. He was Gustav Klimt's protégé, the Vienna Secession."

My father says Schiele is an anatomist; like a doctor, he knows how the body works.

When I get into bed, I am still thinking about this painting. What are the man and woman doing to each other? Is the woman with the red hair my father's wife? Is the man my father? And why do they look so angry?

In the morning, after I fold the sheets and blankets, I try to forget the painting. I open the cabinet and turn on the television. I can turn on the television myself if I am very careful and remember the lesson about the buttons and switches. The tube lights up and there is Howdy Doody, the Peanut Gallery and Clarabell the Clown. I sit close because I want to be in the Peanut Gallery with the other children, laughing and singing. The tube is small and the picture unsteady. There is a button to fix this if only I could find it. I read the words under each one and try to decide if I should twist "horizontal hold" or "vertical hold." As Doodyville settles inside its frame, my father emerges in his seersucker robe, white with pale blue stripes.

Now he is in the kitchen, puttering with a tray for his wife who will stay in bed until about noon or so. He returns and we sit at the table and eat breakfast together. When there are no paintings to tell stories about or intricate meals to prepare, my father reads the newspaper, or answers a telephone call from a friend. All his friends are Austrian and none of them, so far as I can tell, have children. I have heard them say they do not like children. And I have heard my father say he agrees. It is wrong to bring another Jewish child into a world that exterminates Jews, like roaches, he says. So, in a way, it is not surprising that my father does not mention to these friends that I am with him this weekend, sitting at his table, sharing his food, and listening to stories about his new paintings.

He goes into the bedroom with his newspaper and when he comes out his wife is behind him shouting in German. She cannot stand me in the house another minute, she says. I am clearing the table as I have been taught and when I hear her shouting, I drop a bowl and a box of cereal. It's a terrible mess, my father says, and I'll have to clear it up. My fingers begin to twitch, and I want to cry but if I cry the shouting will get worse. It's already worse.

I wonder if my mother knows about the painting, not the one with the poppies but the one in the bedroom where the mirror used to be. When I get home on Sunday night, I'm going to ask her what it means when a man lies on top of a woman in this way.

The man and the woman in the painting are completely exposed. I do not realize this until I begin telling my mother about the painting. It is not only the man's hips that are in the air but also his buttocks, his testicles and his pubic hair, though, of course I do not have words to explain what I have seen except maybe the words "hip" and "naked." I have written down the artist's name in my notebook and made my own sketch of the man lying on top of the woman. My mother has heard of Egon Schiele—he is Austrian, *nicht*?—but my drawing is indecipherable and she is therefore unable to answer my question.

On Wednesdays, when he picks me up from school, my father takes me to a gallery owned by Serge Sabarsky. Mr. Sabarsky greets my father with a handshake and the words "Herr Doktor," but by the end of the visit he is calling him "Fritz," even though they continue to talk in a formal way and stand at a peculiar distance from one another—not too close, not too far—with their hands in their pockets. During these conversations, paintings are taken down off the walls or brought out by assistants from the back rooms. My father considers each one carefully. He will not buy until he is ready. Just look at how that house sits there, he might say. The lines, they make me want to sing. If he warms to a painting in this way, he will usually write a check.

By the time I am ten, the Schieles are an obsession. My father is now a regular guest at the galleries that buy and sell Schiele's work and has contacted private collectors in Europe. At unexpected moments and in all spare moments, he escapes from his office to the galleries, handling the paintings and drawings, rotating them under the light, buying, selling and consolidating his collection. Even on Saturdays, now, there are trips to Sabarsky's gallery and the Galerie St. Etienne on 57th Street where Otto Kallir, also from Austria, is waiting. Drawings, watercolors, and oils. The potency of Schiele's line is almost inexplicable, my father says.

During these expeditions, the woman with red hair stays in the apartment or goes shopping. And I am pleased, pleased that I have my father to myself. I am paying attention to his stories, to Serge Sabarsky's stories, to Otto Kallir's stories. The collectors are keening for lost canvases and Schiele's too early death, age 28, in the influenza epidemic of 1918.

One day, when the red-haired woman is not yet back from

her spree, my father pulls out a sketchbook. Not even my wife knows that I draw, he says. For a moment I think he is talking about my mother but she is no longer his wife; the red-haired woman is his wife.

He allows me to hold the book and flip the pages. The drawings are mostly landscapes, hills, a stand of trees, rivers, the sawmill in the small village on the Hungarian border where my father spent his boyhood years.

The sketches are very beautiful, I say.

I wanted to draw like Schiele, my father says, brusquely, shutting the book.

Week after week, month after month, paintings and drawings accumulate in my father's apartment. Schieles in every room, on every wall, in every corner. The artist's wife, Edith, in a striped dress. Women embracing. Men embracing. Kneeling nudes and seminudes. The portrait of Edith is clothed and demure. Her expression is wistful, childlike, and expectant. An expression of longing. Schiele gave up his mistress and his dissipate life to marry her. How old am I when I learn this word—mistress? Maybe eleven. Maybe twelve.

There are other images, less benign, cadaverous images the artist made of himself in which he is devouring himself from the inside out, a mutilated torso of bone and skin, without a hand, without an arm. When I ask about these paintings, what they mean, what they are for, my father says Schiele is an anatomist; like a doctor, he knows how the body works. But what I notice is the crazed eyes, the green, yellow and orange skin, and the erections, at eye level.

I do not know the word erection and, if I did, what would I say to my father? How would I tell him I do not want his arm around me any more or I do not want him to greet me with his hand between my neck and angel wing when I arrive at his apartment on Friday nights.

Now comes a parade: Images of young girls, two or three years older than I, with rumpled clothing pulled down to their knees. A girl with raised skirt, her labia, vulva and vagina, the compositional center of the painting, like a snuff movie, her head thrown back in a death throe in an eerie foreshadowing of corpses in the death camps. Is this what my cousin Lili looked like when she was killed?

Later, as an adult, I study Schiele's children. Street urchins, children of prostitutes who agreed to pose for a fee, or a tangerine, or a roasted chestnut, or a glacé. There were many who came to Schiele's studio. In the work, they become specimens or corpses surrounded by air, hands across their chests in mock shame, always the full frontal genitalia assaulting the viewer's eye. When he did not have a model, Schiele sketched women in a gynecologist's office or "hysterics" at the insane asylum, or himself grimacing or masturbating in front of the mirror.

In 1912, Egon Schiele's artistic career was interrupted. He was accused of abducting a thirteen-year-old girl, a runaway, and forcing her to have sex. The girl's father found her in Schiele's studio and called the police. The charge of seducing a minor was dropped, but because the child had been exposed to the nude studies in the studio, Schiele was sentenced to prison for negligent custody of erotic nude material. In all, he spent twenty-four days in jail. At the trial, the judge averred the material was incendiary, an offense to bourgeois sensibility, and proceeded to burn one of the sketches for the benefit of the attendant press.

How is it possible to admire Schiele's work? Why has my father chosen this work? Why did he subject me to this work? These are questions I ask when I am older, contemplating the lacuna of my lost childhood. My father, long dead, would not, I am sure, have been able to answer these questions, or would have ignored them. Now, as I wander through the Leopold Collection on loan to the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the fall of 1997, I am overcome by the images of abject children, even newborns, all parentless, without toys or playgrounds or flowered fields, utterly alone in Schiele's universe. This is exactly how I felt in my father's home every weekend I was there.

I am in a gallery with strangers on audio tours. Midway through the exhibition is a room with catalogues tied to the

I am overcome by the images of abject children, utterly alone in Schiele's universe. This is exactly how I felt in my father's home every weekend I was there.

tables with wire ropes. I sit and pour through the thick paper, admire the quality of the reproductions, search for my father's name under the heading "provenance." But it is invisible, hidden beneath the scrim of "private collection," or the name of a gallery or museum. Strange, like my father, Dr. Leopold, who amassed this collection, is an ophthalmologist. What does the eye see? What does the eye behold? There is an implication in the family name—*schielen*—to squint.

At the Galerie St. Etienne, still owned by the Kallir family, there is a companion exhibit. One of my father's paintings is here, the provenance clear in the catalogue raisonné, "Woman with Blond Hair & Blue Garment" (1912). This woman is fully clothed. Of the more than 3,000 drawings and 300 paintings Egon Schiele produced in his lifetime, the tormented, pornographic images are in the minority. Still, they exist; they cannot be ignored. Certainly, I cannot ignore them or conclude, blithely, that my father's obsession with Egon Schiele was normal. Nor can I appreciate fully the genius of this critically acclaimed artist. To do that, I must abandon memory. And this, of course, is impossible. ■

Carol Bergman's articles, essays and profiles have appeared in numerous publications in Britain and the US. She is the author of two film biographies (Mae West, Sidney Poitier,) and the ghost of Captain Kangaroo's autobiography, Growing Up Happy. *A memoir,* Searching for Fritzi, *and a trilogy of novellas,* Sitting for Klimt, *are pending publication. She teaches writing at New York University and Gotham Writers' Workshop.*

BOOK ESSAY

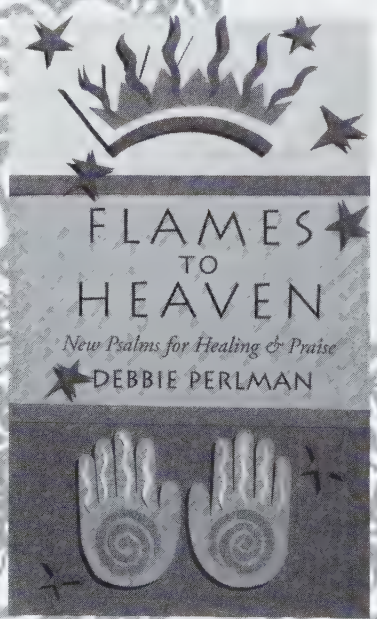
LIFE: THE UNEXPURGATED EDITION

BY RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

WHEN ILLNESS REQUIRES US TO LOOK FOR A NEW JOB

Some years ago I read a book by a young woman named Jenny Morris who one day climbed out on a dangerous ledge to save a toddler, but ended up falling herself, becoming paraplegic. In the hospital, the doctor who broke the news to Morris called her new reality "tragic" — a statement that infuriated her. "No one can call my life a tragedy but me," she fumed, even at that moment when her life was dividing steeply into "Before" and "After." In the years subsequent to the accident, Morris built a new life for herself, including a notable career as a disabilities activist and writer. Morris became one of those living examples of that bedrock adage of the disabilities community: that when God closes a door, She opens a window. It may take a long time, it may feel like it's never going to happen, but eventually God opens a goddamn window.

Most non-disabled people (and those who have not, in some way, been significantly pruned back in life) live largely unexamined lives — closing off doors and windows all over the place that they're not even aware of. In contrast, in the chronic illness group that I belong to, for example, veteran members routinely inspire the rest of us through their example of intimacy with *examined* life. They specialize in acutely recognizing every nook and cranny of their free will. What they *can* do, *can't* do, *have* to do, *don't* have to do, truly *must* do for their own mental health: This hour, this day, last winter, next year, at 4 a.m., at the end of the day. Unlike the "un-pruned," who are privileged to carry on in life fairly sloppily, these veterans have actually learned, for example, how to say "no" to things they do not want to do — which is very rare, especially for females. At any given moment, they inerrantly know the precise status of each of their "doors" and "windows." Organizing their lives in luxurious, symbiotic relation to what really matters, they make some of the "un-pruned" of this world look almost comically blindered and driven.



A fair number of people who become disabled in adulthood face the prospect of changing vocations. In my support group, one woman who used to be a lawyer became a fabric artist. Another was a clerk, but now

she works in religious education. When we talk about "careers," the discussion is strikingly different from such conversations in the normative, healthy world. The physically compromised often come to their vocations after years of messes and disappointments and turnings aside. *Lots* of closed doors *and* windows. Lots of brambly walks through the valley of the shadow. When these people finally hack through the mess, however, their work takes on the character of a *beshert* "calling" — a career sent to them, specifically, by God.

I remember one meeting of my group in which a middle-aged woman told a weepy newcomer (who was depressed because she could no longer work in her profession) about her own career trajectory. She said, as a lot of people in pain do, that the biblical Psalms were an important source of comfort to her, but that she used to sit in church and feel completely irritated by the last line of Psalm 23.

"That's my favorite Psalm," she told the newcomer, "but the last line ['I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever'] pissed me off because I could never get it. How does someone 'dwell in the house of the Lord forever?' What does that *mean*? I had long given up any hope of working in my profession again," she said, "and I was volunteering at a wildlife sanctuary, work that eventually turned into a part-time job, even though I had no training in that area. One day I was hand-feeding a hawk, and I realized that this was a wonderful thing to do. This was okay. This was it. I was 'dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.' I had come home to the *whole psalm*. That's where work had led me."

The story was a profound moment for members of the group. We realized that not very many people — especially not the "unpruned," towards whom we often felt envy — could brag in quite this way about their domestic partnership.

Debbie Perlman, the author of a beautiful, pocket-sized new book, *Flames to Heaven: New Psalms for Healing & Praise*, is a twenty-year cancer survivor whose many rounds of radiation and chemotherapy left her with a chunk of lung missing and a daily dietary supplement of wheelchairs, physical therapy and ventilators. Still, Perlman says, she considers her life "a very good one."

"My medical history leaves people aghast," Debbie explains, "but you learn over time that there are many ways to live with illness. Pretty much, I have a really good life. I can't go out and buy a new body, but I *can* do the things that are important to me. I have a loving family. You can be constantly angry or you can choose to adapt. I choose to adapt. I don't want to say I'm in a 'state of grace' — that sounds kind of theologically *goyishe*. But I'm content. I am. I really am. Which is not to say I don't get really tired of all the medical shticks I have to do every day."

Perlman, who is 47, was trained to work as an occupational therapist, but her illness, instead, led her haltingly but decidedly to a *sui generis* career. She is Resident Psalmist at Beth Emet Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois. She is the *only* Resident Psalmist in the world, holding a job that's been unfilled for three millennia.

And what does a "Resident Psalmist" do?

"I write Psalms for each new birth in the congregation, for anniversaries, for holidays, for special crises and opportunities in the life of the shul and its members," Perlman explains. "People need to be blessed, and they need *to* bless. A new psalm gives people strength, helps them recognize that their lives are sacred, that we are very much connected to the prayer book and the Bible that we hold in our laps. That life has more holy moments in it than we think. When people tell me they pray with *my* words . . . I can't imagine anything more amazing. It blows me away."

SEEKING: RESIDENT PSALMIST. POSITION HAS BEEN VACANT FOR 3000 YEARS.

In Perlman's introduction to her book of 160 psalms, she explains where the psalms "come from." When a woman with recurrent cancer, for example, calls Debbie and asks, crying, 'How did you feel when [the doctors] said you might not make it?,' Debbie has no answer. "That's where a psalm comes from," she explains, "from that place of giving answers where there aren't yet answers."

Perlman's "answers" include "Psalm One: A Song for Comfort Before Surgery," dedicated to "H.J.L.," through "Psalm One Hundred Sixty: A Song of Praise." In between there are numbered psalms with subtitles such as "One Year Later," "Tu B'Shvat," "For the Waiting Ones," "After Hearing *Avinu Malkeinu*," "For Changes/ Outside the Student Union," "Hospice," "Sabbatical, For P.S.K.," and many others.

Debbie's life as a Psalmist started in 1991 when her wheelchair could not be negotiated in the snowy slush outside Yad Vashem, Jerusalem's Holocaust memorial. While her husband

and daughter visited the buildings without her, she sat and wept, feeling inexorably sorry for herself, reading a palm-sized Book of Psalms that she had purchased the day before at the Israel Museum.

"Shortly after that I wrote a psalm for a dear friend who was facing something very frightening. Then I wrote another, and another. There were an awful lot of things that needed to be said. A lovely man died, a friend had a friend facing infertility. I started to feel strongly that there was a reason that I was writing these things. There is always more to say, and it started to feel like it was my turn to say it."

A friend of Debbie's, only half in jest, claims that Debby is "channeling" for King David, and Perlman, in some sense, concurs. "I do feel called," she says simply. In her introduction to *Flames to Heaven,* Perlman explains how, when she began on this new path of psalmody, she felt as though "the ancient rhythms that stirred King David and the other psalmists were reverberating in me. Somehow, I belonged. I was next in that line. I wasn't trying to write; the words were just *there.* When the biblical Psalmist wrote the 150," she says, "that wasn't the end of it." Like many people who have had transformative spiritual experiences, Debbie adds, "I like being in the in-group."

A frequent question to Perlman is how — when her lot in life has been so fraught with struggle — she can praise God again and again. "Sometimes it's really hard," she answers honestly, "like in the morning prayers when we thank God for 'opening our arteries.' I have a morning breathing treatment that involves my attaching this noisy machine called a nebulizer to my tracheostomy tube. The two treatments — praying *shacharit* and the pulmonary regimen — take the same amount of time, about 25, 30 minutes, so I do them together. How can I thank God for health while I'm doing this thing that's grossly called 'pulmonary toilet?' Well, there's such a continuum of health and non-health. Being well enough to say the blessing has to mean *something.* Being in a place that you're aware enough and alert enough to *davven* is a privilege. I don't believe that God makes illness. God gives us strength and opportunities to survive whatever it is we have to survive."

"Sometimes," Debbie says, " I read one of my psalms and I cry, which is ridiculous at this point, I've read it a million times. But it comes back to me how it felt to be that ill, that close to death." The power of psalms, indeed (both the original 150 and these new 160), comes explicitly from being *in extremis.* If you are not in pain, you miss the power. "Psalm One," says Debbie, "was written for a friend who was terrified of surgery. In this psalm I'm grabbing God by the elbow. 'Listen!' I'm saying, I'm shaking God. 'Listen! Because I'm really scared. I'm scared, so please listen to me.'"

"LISTEN!" I'M SAYING, I'M SHAKING GOD. "LISTEN! BECAUSE I'M REALLY SCARED. I'M SCARED, SO PLEASE LISTEN TO ME."

Debbie Perlman's work reminds us that, on some unexamined level, we imagine the Hebrew canon as permanently closed, but it's not. It's a door that opens — we just forget to try the handle. We can *still*, in Perlman's words, "weave lasting threads" into the fabric that is Judaism. The sacred books are still unfolding; our voices are not irrelevant or cut off. There are doors and windows all over the place. We are part of the stream, we are deeply connected.

When the Hebrew Scriptures were canonized, says Debbie firmly, "that *wasn't* the end of it." Our voices and words continue to make God's heart beat, continue to help God breathe. Each of us has an everlasting shot of being in the in-group, of coming home to the whole psalm. ■

FIVE
A LULLABY FOR COURAGE

O Eternal, hold me with gentleness
Through this long night of pain;
Lay Your cool hand upon my body.
As a mother strokes the fevered brow
Of her beloved child,
Give me succor.

O Eternal, clasp me to Your bosom,
And rock me with quiet motion,
To and fro as the seconds pass,
Waiting, waiting for the next relief,
Stretching endlessly toward the dawn.

O Eternal, sing me to calm,
Humming a lullaby my grandmother sang
As she arranged the soup bowl on the tray,
And brought it to me with the warmth of her smile.
Sing me that song to soothe my soul.

O Eternal, guard me through this darkness.
Wrap me in a soft warm quilt of Your regard
That I might find a paragraph of flickering comfort
To read and remember
Within this long, grim novel.

O Eternal, keep me safe through this night;
And let the morning come to renew me,
To return me, to heal me.
To find me enfolded in the vigor of Your love.

TWENTY-EIGHT
FOR THE CAREGIVERS

Show me how to offer comfort.
Point out Your nesting place,
Feathered against the adversities
That wound those I love.

Show me tolerance,
When I am weary of helping,
And a long dreary day
Stretches toward a restless night.

You place before us life and love;
Show us endurance.
You place before us healing and hope;
Show us persistence.

Reach deep within me, Eternal Strength,
And bring my strength to consciousness.
Pull it around us:
Let it radiate with Your power,
Let it guide our way.

ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-ONE
GOING HOME

Strengthen me, Holy One, on my walk
from illness.
Even as You gave courage
As the children fled from Egypt,
Open the sea to my steps.

Like a Hebrew slave,
I have sojourned in pain;
Under whips of illness and despair,
I have shed my tears of bitterness.

Show me again the path of freedom,
Speeding toward a Promised Land
Of wholeness and health,
Creating my completeness for Your sake.

Bring me up through recovery,
Through remedies and therapies,
To an altered yet acceptable life,
Again rejoicing in the commonplace.

Then will my songs fill this recovered shore.
Where my mind will dance for joy
At my deliverance,
Singing Your praises, Holy One, singing
new songs.

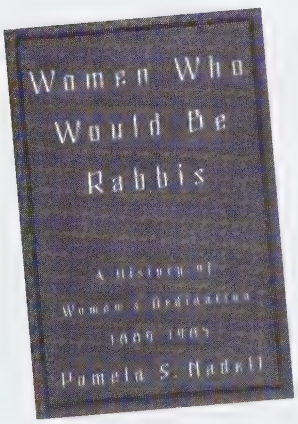
Excerpts from *Flames to Heaven: New Psalms for Healing & Praise*, by Debbie Perlman, $14. To order, call 800-888-4741.

How the Struggle to Be Rabbis Began

By Francine Klagsbrun

Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985
by Pamela S. Nadell
Beacon Press, $27.50

Back in 1890s, the "girl rabbi of the golden west" was already preaching from Reform pulpits.



From 1977 to 1978 I served on the Commission for the Study of Women in the Rabbinate of the Jewish Theological Seminary, formed to examine the issue of whether women should be ordained as rabbis in the Conservative movement. Throughout that year, the commission deliberated such questions as: "Are there *halachic* [Jewish legal] barriers that would prevent women from becoming rabbis?" "Will the community regard women's ordination as a dangerous break with tradition?" "Should women have the same roles as men in religious life?"

We knew that the Reform movement had been ordaining women as rabbis for some time. But because that movement does not consider itself bound by Jewish law, we viewed our investigation as a first. Had anyone told us, in fact, that for almost a century other Jewish communities had repeatedly grappled with the same questions as we, our commission would have been shocked. Those of us committed to seeing women become rabbis might also have found important precedents and support for our position in those earlier conflicts.

In her lucid and engrossing book, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis,* Pamela Nadell gives us that necessary background to women's struggles to be ordained as rabbis. With authoritative research and sometimes heart-breaking examples, she shows how women who wanted to be rabbis raised the same arguments again and again, often unaware of those who preceded them. Only when enough women joined forces to sustain and strengthen one another did they succeed in their cause. And only then were they able to build on past history, not reinvent it.

Back in 1889, a journalist named Mary M. Cohen, writing in Philadelphia's Jewish Exponent, posed the theoretical question: "Could not our women be ministers?" During the decades that followed, individual women strove to answer that question affirmatively. There was Ray Frank, known as the "girl rabbi of the golden west," who in the 1890s preached from Reform synagogue pulpits in the American West. But though she studied at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and maintained that women should be able to hold any position they wanted in Jewish life, including that of rabbi, she never sought formal ordination.

There was Martha Neumark, who did seek, but failed to achieve, a Reform rabbinical degree. As a student at Hebrew Union College in 1920, she asked to be assigned a High Holiday pulpit. Her request set off an intensive two-year debate on women's ordination throughout the Reform movement. Those opposed argued, as they would for years to come, that ordaining women would cause a major schism in the Jewish world. Proponents held, as they would continue to, that women educated equally with men deserved the equal honor of ordination. In the end, although many faculty and alumni supported Miss Neumark, the school's Board of Governors decreed that ordination must remain limited to males only. Half a century would pass before they would reverse that decree.

Perhaps the most poignant life story was that of Helen Levinthal, daughter of renowned Conservative rabbi Israel Levinthal. In 1939 she completed the entire rabbinical curriculum at the Jewish Institute of Religion, a liberal rabbinical school that would later merge with Hebrew Union College. But the faculty refused to ordain a woman, and she graduated with only a Master of Hebrew Literature degree. Thirty-three years later, with the Reform movement about to ordain its first female rabbi, Helen Levinthal requested that she now be granted her rabbinical degree. Sadly, and mysteriously, her academic record at JIR could not be found, and her plea was refused. Instead, in 1988, less than a year before her death, she received a special award as a pioneer in women's scholarship.

The dispute about women's ordination in the Conservative movement dragged on for years, even after our commission recommended in favor of it. The debates pro and con that raged in the Seminary halls echoed once again those heard through the century. The battle ended definitively in 1985 with the ordination of Amy Eilberg as the first female Conservative rabbi.

Now the issue of ordaining women has been raised in the Orthodox movement. "Once the question of the woman rabbi is opened, it will not go away," Pamela Nadell says in concluding her thoughtful analysis. Orthodox women who would be rabbis would do well, she suggests, to look to the scholarship and arguments of others before them. By learning from the past and bolstering one another in the present, they, too, can "create their own revolutions."

Francine Klagsbrun is a writer and lecturer. Her most recent book is Jewish Days: A Book of Jewish Life and Culture Around the Year.

The Jew Store

by Stella Suberman
Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, $19.95

The Jew Store is a homespun and home-focused tale that at the same time covers religion, prejudice, generational differences and the profound question of what 'home' really means. Stella Suberman takes us back to her childhood stomping ground, a small Southern burg populated with everyone from a red-faced, spit-spewing Klansman to plump Miss Brookie, a college-educated woman who is trying to spread her religion of "helping people" to her backwoods town.

This autobiography, which reads like a novel, opens in 1920, when the Bronson family moves to tiny Concordia, Tennessee, to start a "Jew store," a dry-goods emporium that seems to be the particular metier of Jews. Aaron Bronson is excited by the chance to prove his superior salesmanship; his wife, Reba, reluctantly pulled from her insular family in the South Bronx, struggles to keep kosher and to keep away her anxiety about not raising her children among Jews. At first the Bronsons are treated with suspicion—some of the locals even check for their horns—but the business is a success, and the town gradually takes them in as "almost kin." Ultimately, however, their differences determine the family's fate.

Suberman's chronicle is informed by passed-down stories as well as her own memory, which begins half-way through the story. The stories have the delightful feel of having been told and retold around the family dinner table, and their language is a hefty sprinkling of Yiddish mixed with a heaping dollop of small-town Southern speak.

This book, however, is not just about one family, or even about one town. *The Jew Store* is a warm, thoughtful portrait of what it once meant to be an immigrant Jew with aspirations in the midst of America.

—Tamara Fishman

Apples from the Desert

by Savyon Liebrecht
The Feminist Press, $20

What could be better, when you wake early on a Sunday feeling far away from your roots, than to pick up Savyon Liebrecht's *Apples from the Desert*? You are there with your Israeli sisters and your history, tasting and living it.

NEW VICTORIA PUBLISHERS presents:
IN EVERY LAUGH A TEAR
A novel by LESLÉA NEWMAN $11.95

"A moving story of dedication and love."
—Bay Windows

"A superb novel. The characters are richly detailed, the interactions between Shayna and the rest of the world marvelously funny and painfully moving."
—Bay Area Reporter

'Nice Jewish girl,' Shayna Steinblatt is worried that her beloved Bubbe has been trundled off to a nursing home. Meanwhile Shayna is falling in love.

Lesléa Newman has made a significant contribution to literature with her more than twenty books of poetry, short stories and children's books.

CALL OR WRITE FOR A FREE CATALOG
New Victoria Publishers,
PO Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055
1-800-326-5297
email: newvic@aol.com

"A pioneering book."
—Saul Friedländer

Women in the Holocaust

Edited by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman

This remarkable book explores for the first time the special tribulations women faced during the Holocaust and their unique ways of coping.

$30.00
Yale University Press
1-800-YUP-READ www.yale.edu/yup/

HaSha'ar — Preparing Leaders to Transform Jewish Education

DRISHA INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH EDUCATION and BEIT RABBAN CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION are pleased to announce the establishment of

HA SHA'AR
A PROGRAM OF JEWISH STUDIES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR FUTURE DAY SCHOOL EDUCATORS

HASHA'AR IS DESIGNED to encourage exceptional young women and men who are devoted to Jewish learning to pursue careers in Jewish education.

Fellows receive an $18,000 stipend to support their participation in a unique, year-long program which integrates the study of Jewish texts and the ideas and practice of education.

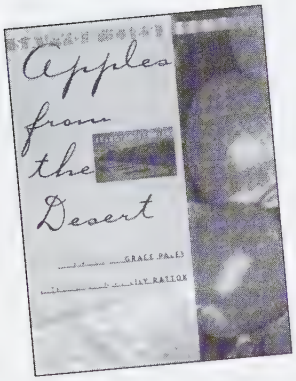
Fellows commit to teaching in a day school for the following two years, while receiving ongoing support and professional development from the HaSha'ar faculty.

We welcome inquiries from potential applicants and other interested members of the community.

Fellowship cycle begins July 1999. Applications now available.

For further information contact RUTH FAGEN, Associate Director
131 West 86th Street • New York, NY 10024
Phone (212) 595-8153 • Fax (212) 595-0679 • Email hashaar@beitrabban-drisha.org

HaSha'ar is funded by a major grant from the Nash Family Foundation



I first discovered Liebrecht six years ago in a dim periodical room at Berkeley. I found "Excision," which tells the story of a Holocaust survivor who chops off her grandchild's golden hair when the child's possible infection with head lice triggers horrifying memories of the camps for the grandmother. Thanks to The Feminist Press, we now have *Apples from the Desert* [the title story of which appeared for the first time in English in LILITH], a collection that includes 12 short stories and an introduction by Grace Paley.

At 50, Liebrecht is gaining international recognition. Born in 1948 in Munich of Holocaust-survivor parents, she now delves into current emotional, sociological and political themes, including the tensions inherent in Israeli life. Occasionally the heft of those themes would be more satisfying in novel form.

Liebrecht's protagonists often identify with the Other: Arabs, Sephardic Jews, the elderly, women, children. Many characters in the stories suffer from an inability to forge a unique, individual identity. With unblinking honesty she depicts the personal tragedies and the small acts of courage that grow from deep-rooted conflicts. In "The Road to Cedar City," an uneasy bond develops between a Palestinian woman and a Jewish woman vacationing in America, and in "What Am I Speaking, Chinese? She Said to Him," a story reminiscent of *The Yellow Wallpaper,* she cracks open a post-modern sexual rebellion on the part of a Holocaust survivors offspring. As Amalia Kahana-Carmon became one of the pioneers of Israeli women prose writers of past generations, her protegee, Savyon Liebrecht, is becoming an interpreter not only of present but also of future Israeli generations.

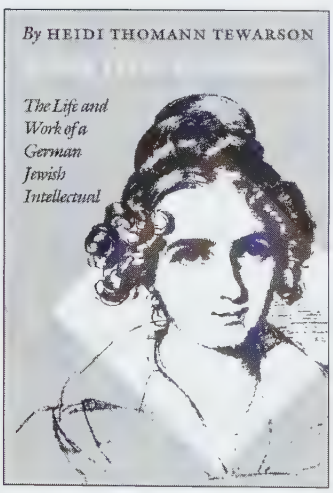
—Elaine Starkman

With Roots in Heaven: One Woman's Passionate Journey Into the Heart of Her Faith

by Tirzah Firestone
Dutton, $24.95

With Roots in Heaven is Tirzah Firestone's Jewish entry into the bestselling genre of highly personal autobiography by women. In it, Firestone recounts the story of her life from her Orthodox upbringing through involvements with kumdalini yoga, Arica, karma cleaning, tai chi,

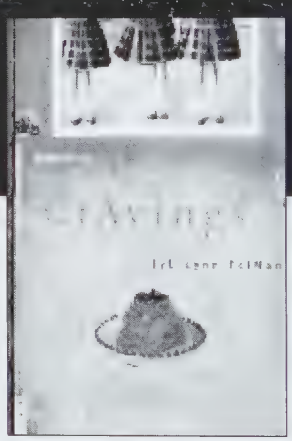
BY HEIDI THOMANN TEWARSON
RAHEL LEVIN VARNHAGEN
The Life and Work of a German Jewish Intellectual



Rahel Levin Varnhagen (1771–1833) is known for the salon she initiated in Berlin, which became a center for intellectuals and artists of various social classes. Heidi Thomann Tewarson provides a new and comprehensive portrait of this remarkable woman and highlights Varnhagen's reputation as a leading intellectual of her era.
$20 paper/$45 cloth

publishers of Bison Books 800-755-1105 nebraskapress.unl.edu
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS

CRAVINGS
A Sensual Memoir
Jyl Lynn Felman



In this darkly funny memoir of growing up the youngest of three girls in a Jewish American family, Jyl Lynn Felman reveals her obsessive love for her mother and the bittersweet cravings that have fueled her adult life. Her stunning combination of raw emotional images, an innovative prose style, and a working-class sensibility illuminates the sensual experience of childhood.

"Beautifully written and painfully honest. After turning the final page, I was hungry for more." —HOPE EDELMAN

NOW IN PAPERBACK $13.00
BLUESTREAK EDITION

AVAILABLE IN BOOKSTORES

BEACON PRESS, BOSTON www.beacon.org

occult astrology, aura reading, EST, Holocaust hallucinations, a Hindu survivalist cult, and Jungian analysis until she discovers Renewal Judaism and is privately ordained as a rabbi in that sect. Along the way, she describes in almost lurid detail her travels, lovers, hospitalization for stress-induced uterine hemorrhaging, brother's suicide, sister's return to Orthodoxy, and finally her own intermarriage to a Christian minister who leaves his church to venture on his own religious quest, which includes a pilgrimage to Stonehenge and the assumption of a more Druidic-sounding name.

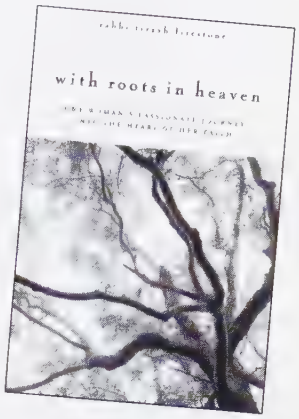
It's difficult to evaluate this kind of book without making judgments on the life of its author. But it is eminently clear from this tale that Firestone believes she has been judged far too much by the Jewish community. Firestone is pleading to be accepted for who she is, no matter how strange that may seem to the mainstream Jewish world. In pursuit of acceptance, Firestone pours forth extremely intimate particulars of her life story.

People, like Firestone, who live "alternative" lives must constantly choose between their safety in an oppressive world and their personal authenticity. Safety from public intolerance is gained through hiding the realities of one's life experience, a "don't ask-don't tell" social ethic. Firestone has instead opted for authenticity, even though such a choice inevitably has a slightly exhibitionistic, Jerry Springer flavor to it.

Given this motivation, it is somewhat disturbing that at every stage of her journey Firestone is intolerant of her earlier choices, and of the choices of others. The pontificating style of some passages is particularly sad, given the unmistakable pain that Firestone has suffered from those who preached at her. Firestone's odyssey clearly points to the profound subjectivity and relativism of spiritual experience, perhaps even of the nature of reality itself, yet Firestone persists in attempting to proclaim ultimate truth.

The book ends as Firestone becomes the charismatic leader of an alternative Renewal community in Boulder, a kind of Jewish guru. The epilogue describes her impending divorce, and I was left wondering if any community, spiritual practice, or person can give Firestone the acceptance she craves. Though humans are social creatures, and tolerance is learned from others, in the end tolerance is a gift that we must bestow upon ourselves.

—Jane Litman



The Deborah Project

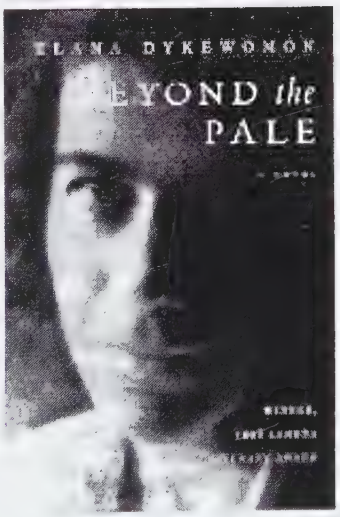
Call for art, midrash, poems

by Jewish women, *about* the Deborah story. Deborah the Judge, Barak, Yael, Sisera, Sisera's mother and her chorus of women, etc.

Deadline March 1, 1999

JEWISH WOMEN'S LITERARY ANNUAL
Jewish Women's Resource Center
National Council of Jewish Women
New York Section
9 East 69th Street, New York, NY 10021

Press Gang Publishers



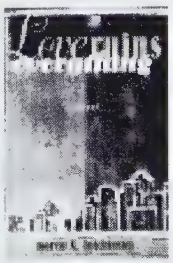
Beyond *the* Pale
by Elana Dykewomon

Winner,
1998 Ferro-Grumley Prize
& 1998 Lambda
Literary Award for
Best Lesbian Fiction

Love Ruins Everything
by Karen X. Tulchinksy

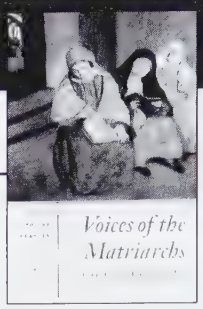
Nominated for the 1998 American Library Assocation Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Book Award

"A stunning depiction of family dynamics. . . Tulchinksy's first novel deserves a large readership."
—Booklist, *starred review*



www.pressgang.bc.ca

DISCOVER NEW CHAPTERS IN JEWISH WOMEN'S HISTORY



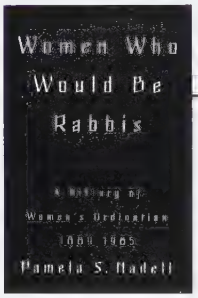
Chava Weissler

VOICES OF THE MATRIARCHS

Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women

"This long-awaited volume on women's devotional prayers is rich in both data and insight. Weissler . . . opens up the worlds of early modern Jewish women's spirituality, and of popular piety. . . . *Voices of the Matriarchs* is **ESSENTIAL READING**." —JUDITH PLASKOW, author of *Standing Again At Sinai*

HARDCOVER $28.50



Pamela S. Nadell

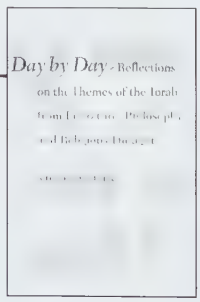
WOMEN WHO WOULD BE RABBIS

A History of Women's Ordination, 1889–1985

"Articulate, perceptive and precise, [Nadell] has written **THE LONG-AWAITED STORY** of women's repeated attempts to become rabbis. . . . Scholars and the general public owe her a collective gesture of gratitude." —NORMA BAUMEL JOSEPH

"Promises to be the definitive study of 'the road to women's ordination' in Judaism." —JONATHAN D. SARNA, editor of *The American Jewish Experience*

HARDCOVER $30.00



Rabbi Chaim Stern

DAY BY DAY

Reflections on the Themes of the Torah from Literature, Philosophy, and Religious Thought

Written and compiled by a beloved rabbi whose prayerbooks are a mainstay of Reform Judaism, *Day by Day* illuminates the themes of the Torah with words by thinkers and writers from an extraordinary range of times and traditions.

"**A BEAUTIFUL, SIMPLE BOOK** to keep us spiritually intact and oriented every day of the week."
—RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR, editor, *Lilith* magazine

HARDCOVER $27.50

BEACON PRESS, BOSTON www.beacon.org

letters

continued from page 7

...And From the Far Right

Deborah Lipstadt has made a name for herself by waging the good fight against the Holocaust revisionists. How inexplicable, then, that in the pages of LILITH she engages in a bit of revisionism herself, distorting beyond recognition the arguments I made in my article "Auschwitz and the Professors" in the June issue of Commentary and leaving readers completely in the dark about some of the shameful things that feminist scholars have been writing about the Holocaust ("Why Is The Wall Street Journal Now Devaluing Women's Holocaust Experiences?" LILITH, Fall 1998).

In *Women in the Holocaust,* the book edited by Lenore Weitzman and Dalia Ofer that Lipstadt attempts to defend, for example, one finds an essay by a scholar named Joan Ringelheim, who advances the bizarre and defamatory argument that in the Holocaust "the sexism of Nazi ideology and the sexism of the Jewish community met in a tragic and involuntary alliance."

Ringelheim's essay is by no means the worst of its kind. In *Making Stories Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (1993), Robin Ruth Linden argues that the ecological impact of "thousands of pounds of human ash dumped into lakes and rivers" is no less urgent a subject than the study of the Holocaust itself, and inquiry into it would serve usefully to "decenter narrowly anthropocentric views of human destruction."

I hardly see why I should be described as "devious" for calling attention to nonsense of this kind. The scholar and survivor Nechama Tec, writing in the Wall Street Journal this past summer, has also spoken out against "feminist zealots" and those "propelled by extreme feminist views" to interject "political agendas" into Holocaust studies. Cynthia Ozick has likened Joan Ringelheim to the Holocaust revisionists, suggesting she has been asking "a morally wrong question, a question that leads us still further down the road of eradicating Jews from history." In fact, even an editor at LILITH herself, Susan Schnur, has lambasted some of the very same feminist scholarship I criticize, writing that Linden's book demonstrates that the "guiding feminist principle—the personal is the political—might sometimes be in need of a restraining check." All this leads me to wonder: Are Tec, Ozick and Schnur also part of the nefarious conservative clique that Lipstadt insists is bent on denigrating women's scholarship?

I urge readers interested in seeing exactly what else of importance Lipstadt left out to consult my original article as well as the numerous letters and my response to them that appeared in the August 1998 issue of Commentary.

Gabriel Schoenfeld
Senior Editor, Commentary
New York, NY

[Editor's Note: We print Gabriel Schoenfeld's letter in full so LILITH readers can see the attitudes that surface when women become the object of scholarly attention. Rabbi Susan Schnur's comment on a book completely unrelated to the current collection, quoted by Schoenfeld from a review more than half a decade old, suggests that not all women's writing about the Holocaust is equally valid; all the more reason why we (and Deborah Lipstadt) find the Weitzman-Ofer book so illuminating. That

Schoenfeld denies the necessity of telling, finally, about what women experienced during that dreadful era should have us clamoring for even more publications on this subject. To order the issue with the original review, the comments by Schoenfeld and the many replies it generated, call 1-888-2-LILITH.]

Corrections

Andrea Levin (Fall 1998) was not a graduate student in public policy prior to her involvement in Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America; she was an associate editor on a public policy journal at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. She was said to embrace "conservative politics," but she is not aligned with any political orthodoxy. Nor does CAMERA, which she heads, take positions on policy matters.

Stars of David is a non-profit information and support network for Jewish and interfaith adoptive families. Their address was incorrectly given in the Summer 1998 issue; it is properly: Stars of David International, Inc., 3175 Commercial Avenue, Suite 100, Northbrook IL 60062-1915; 1-800-STAR-349 or 847-509-9929; fax 847-509-9545; StarsDavid@aol.com; website www.starsofdavid.org

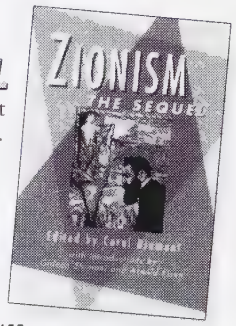
www.lilithmag.com

Visit LILITH's website to order these and any other books—a wonderful way to extend your resources while helping to build LILITH's

ZIONISM THE SEQUEL

edited by Carol Diament
with introductions by Gideon Shimoni and Arnold Eisen.
Price: $18 Hadassah Members, $25 Non Hadassah (Order #R795)

Zionism: The Sequel examines the Zionist idea since the establishment of the State of Israel. Israeli and diaspora writers, from the *haredi* Right to the post-Zionist Left, including ten essays by distinguished women, explore what Zionism has meant and what Zionism means now.



To order call the HADASSAH NATIONAL ORDER DEPARTMENT at 1-800-880-9455.
Leader's Guide available. Please call 212-303-8167 for price and details.

Where else would you find a secular feminist sitting in the same room with an Orthodox man, discussing the future of Judaism?

JEWISH.COMMUNITY

Every day, hundreds of people from all walks of life congregate in the Jewish.Community Online chat rooms to debate, give support, flirt, and say what's on their minds. Come join us!

On America Online at Keyword: JEWISH
For a start-up kit with 50 FREE hours, call 1•800•729•4499
...and read Lilith at Keyword: JEWISH NEWS

Gloria Steinem says
"Lilith . . . creates a voice where there was silence; it saves what is good within the patriarchy while transforming what is destructive; it offers scholarship for argument and women's personal voices for enlightenment; and it does all of this with anger and delight, good writing and humor."

If you agree (and how could you not?), **you can help fund the magazine** that spotlights a female-positive Judaism for girls and women.

Make a tax-deductible contribution to LILITH—for yourself or in honor of a friend or special occasion—by calling toll-free 1-888-2-LILITH. Or send your check to LILITH, 250 W. 57 St., New York NY 10107. We'll mention your name, and the name of your honoree —in the next issue.

marketplace

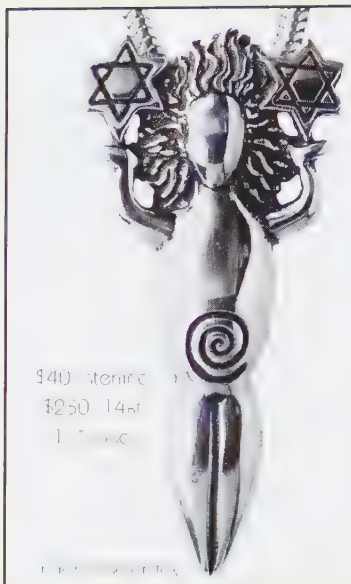
JEWISH POETRY OF NEW MEXICO

Another Desert:
Jewish Poetry of New Mexico

EDITED BY JOAN LOGGHE & MIRIAM SAGAN
Filled with the color of shabbos candles against the turquoise sky, the sounds of the shofar along the Rio Grande and the tastes of chiles, apples, and blintzes. Includes work by Natalie Goldberg, Marjorie Agosín, Robin Becker, and Gene Frumkin.
"An integral part of our Jewish heritage."
—STAN HORDES, PHD

$15.00 PLUS S&H
TO ORDER: 1-888-984-2686

Sherman Asher Publishing
P.O.Box 2853, Santa Fe, NM 87504
www.shermanasher.com
FREE CATALOG



Inspiring, Feminist, Judaic Jewelry by Nomi

For a free catalog:
505-989-3880 505-820-7635 Fax
E-MAIL: nomi@sfol.com
P.O. Box 15702, Santa Fe, NM 87506

It's time to wear your own one-of-a-kind **hand painted silk tallit** created by internationally recognized textile artist **Nancy Katz.**

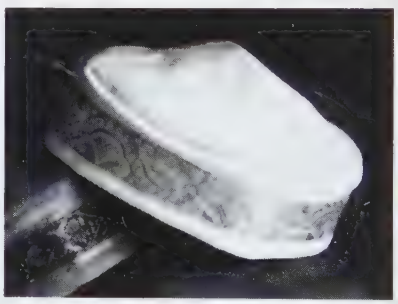
Write or call for a brochure today.
Box 11215 ✡ Berkeley, CA 94701
510/843-5280
nkatzart@aol.com

Glorious Crowns®

New From Harwin Studios! Rainbow Crowns for Children—Available now

ELEGANT KIPPOT FOR CONTEMPORARY JEWISH WOMEN

Glorious Crowns have been designed by Sara Harwin in the Bokharan style. Each hat is made of fine European embroidered ribbon on Ultrasuede. Many colors and sizes available.



Glorious Crowns® by

Harwin Studios
9101 SW 15 Ave
Portland, Oregon
97219
(503) 245-8900
(503) 246-7479
info@harwinstudios.com
www.harwinstudios.com

Schwartz Judaica

Out-of Print
Books of Jewish Interest
Bought & Sold

1934 Pentuckett Ave.
San Diego, CA 92104-5732
Phone: (619) 232-5888
Fax: (619) 233-5833

Catalogue Available
Schwartz@cts.com

JEWISH WOMEN NEEDED AS EGG DONORS

Help a Jewish couple or woman start a family.

Must be healthy, age 21-32, a non-smoker, and of average wt. $5000 compensation plus costs.

For information call Marylin 914-961-3771.

Dedicated to providing caring, supportive service and to offering choice in levels of disclosure. Licensed by NYS DOH.

Reproductive Resources, Inc.
Open Ovum Donor Registry

To order your gift subscriptions today, use the yellow card included with this magazine or call 888-2-LILITH

Fine Quality Jewish Persian Rugs

Judaic Designs Co.

PO Box 194
Mainland,
PA 19451
215-256-3119
fax 215-256-1647

http://www.finejudaica.com

Free catalog mail order books!

Goddess Mythology Past & Present

Browse through my extraordinary collection of large and small press books filled with new thoughts by and about women.

Goddess Connection
613 Silver Springs Circle, #L
Cottonwood, AZ 86326
crmiller@verdenet.com
www.goddessconnection.com

Advertising in LILITH pays!

For rate information call Leslie Hollis Margulies at (212) 757-0818

continued from page 48

But how could I not? I was still trying to decide what to do when I walked into the nursing home, and my grandmother decided for me. Though legally blind by this time, she spotted my ring before I could even take off my coat or open my mouth. "What's that on your finger, an engagement ring, I should live so long?" she asked. I took a deep breath as my grandmother lifted my right hand to her eyes for a closer inspection.

"Yes, Grandma, it is an engagement ring," I said. "Mary gave it to me. We're having a ceremony."

"What?" My grandmother dropped my hand like it was a hot potato and then did something I had never seen her do: she turned her head to the side and spit three times. "*Feh*," she said, crossing her arms. "Lezel, darling, you're ruining your life."

"I am not ruining my life," I folded my arms, too, but there was no arguing with her. She had seen people "like me" on television, and they had changed, so why couldn't I? When I told her I had no intention of changing, that I was happy the way I was, she looked at me with disdain.

"Happy, what do you know from happy?" she asked. "You think you know what's best for you, you never listen to anyone, you think you're so smart, you think you know everything. Well, you know something? You're too smart for your own good. *Feh*," she spit again and then clapped her hands together like she was dusting flour off them, a gesture I was very familiar with. It meant, that's all I have to say: case closed.

I left my grandmother without kissing her good-bye and cried all the way home. Maybe my family was right, I thought. Maybe it would have been better if she had never known. Now I had upset her, and my grandmother needed more aggravation like she needed a hole in the head. I anticipated angry messages from my parents and my siblings on my answering machine waiting to greet me when I got home, which I also needed like a hole in the head. But when I opened the door, no blinking red light met my swollen eyes. In fact the phone didn't ring at all until six o'clock the next morning.

"Mameleh, I didn't sleep the whole night, so upset I was that you was mad on me." My grandmother's voice was shaky with emotion. "Listen, darling, I thought it over and all right, if you're happy, I'm happy, too. Okay, darling? You're my Lezel and you'll always be my Lezel. You could sleep with a dog and I wouldn't care, I would still love you."

Though Mary and I got a lot of mileage out of that comment for years to come, all I could do at that moment was choke back the tears in my throat and say, "Really, Grandma? You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. I'm an old woman, darling, I don't got a lot of time left, so let's not fight no more."

Unfortunately my grandmother's words proved to be true; she died a few months after our phone conversation and she never did dance at my wedding. But she did give Mary and me her blessing. In fact, she treated Mary very differently the next time she saw her. She treated her like—for lack of a better word—a son-in-law, taking great interest in her job, her income, her plans for the future. When the visit was over, she placed Mary's hand on top of mine and told us to take care of each other. She said to me, "I love you, darling," and then she said to Mary, "and I love you, too, for taking such good care on her." When I started to cry, she said, "Shah," and turned away, but the quaver in her voice betrayed her: she was crying, too. ■

Lesléa Newman's novel, In Every Laugh a Tear, *the story of a 99-year-old Jewish woman and her lesbian granddaughter, has just been released in a new edition from New Victoria Publishers.*

LIKEMINDED

Women's Exchange, USA. After 18 conferences in the FSU, Project Kesher is bringing the good times home. A global community of Jewish women interested in spirituality and social activism will have their first North American conference (in the Chicago area) April 29-May 2, 1999. Meet leaders from the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union and learn how they have transformed their communities. *Project Kesher, 1134 Judson Ave., Evanston, IL, 60202; (847)332-1994; projectkesher@compuserve.com*

A Jewish Meditation Conference at New York City's Congregation Anshe Chesed will include a "contemplative *shabbaton*" April 9-10 and sessions on meditation and contemporary Jewish life on April 10-11. Teachers include Sylvia Boorstein, Sheila Peltz Weinberg, Nan Fink Geffen, Shefa Gold, Lawrence Kushner, Michael Strassfeld, Jonathan Omer-Man and Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Information from: *Elat Chayyim, 99 Mill Hook Rd., Accord, NY 12404; (800)695-5208; (914)626-4997; conference@elatchayyim.org*

SEND IT IN

Help Tell the Deborah Story. The call is out for art, *midrashim* and poems by Jewish women about Deborah the Judge and Barak, Yael, Sisera, Sisera's mother and her chorus of women from the biblical book of Judges 4:4-5:31. *Jewish Women's Literary Annual, Jewish Women's Resource Center, National Council of Jewish Women-New York Section, 9 E. 69th St., New York, NY 10021.*

That Takes Ovaries: Bold Females and Their Brazen Acts. For a collection of first-person narratives send your story (maximum 1,000 words) of something you've done that was gutsy, courageous, audacious or inspirational. Include a one-sentence bio and send (preferably via e-mail) with word count, return address, phone and e-mail by January 15, 1999, to: *That Takes Ovaries!, 12 Fern St., Lexington, MA, 02421-6013; redelson@gis.net*

Simchat Chochmah—a new Jewish ritual for women making the transition from mid-life to eldering years—is the subject of a documentary film in production. Have you had a ceremony of wisdom? Want to learn more about the film? Contact filmmakers: *Judith Montell & Miriam Chaya, Chochmah Productions, 2600 10th St., Berkeley, CA 94710; jmontell@worldnet.att.net*

Here's your chance! Book proposals on Jewish women's identity or roles in Jewish life—any era, any region—are requested for an international book series sponsored by the International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University. Send manuscript proposals (3-5 pages) to *Phyllis Deutsch, University Press of New England, 23 S. Main St., Hanover, NH 03755; (603)643-7100x222.*

Feminist Israeli Readings of the Bible. Please send 20-25-pp. articles or one-page proposals with a brief bio by March 15, 1999, to *Esther Fuchs, Department of Near East Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ 85721; fax (520)621-2333; fuchs@u.arizona.edu.*

STUDY

Women in Rabbinic Literature is a text-based class taught via the Internet by Talmud professor Judith Hauptman. Time to learn more about relations between the sexes, giving testimony in court, laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance, with a gifted teacher and scholar. The course begins January 17. You can take it for pleasure, for credit or for professional development—no matter where you live. Contact *Michael Starr, Jewish Theological Seminary, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027; (212)678-8897; fax (212)749-9085; mistarr@jtsa.edu; http:www.courses.jtsa.edu.*

AMAZING NEW PUBLICATIONS

The Life and Times of Farha, A Woman of the Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora (1870-1958) is an essay by Jael Silliman in the first issue of the new **Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies**. Subscriptions worldwide are $15. *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies c/o Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 9 Campus Dr., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada S7N 0W0.*

Agronomist Hanna Meisel (1883-1972) started a girls training farm at Kinneret in 1911 that became the nucleus of an independent women's movement which lasted from 1919 to 1927. These and other fascinating items—not omitting David Ben Gurion's many amorous partners—can be gleaned from a 50-page **"Timeline of Women and Women's Issues in the Yishuv and Israel"** created by Shulamit Reinharz. Free from *International Research Institute on Jewish Women, MS-079 Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 02454-9110.*

Are women obligated by the commandments to be joyful on the three pilgrimage festivals? These and other consciousness-raising issues are discussed in the first issue of ***Kolech*** (Your Voice), a Hebrew newsletter written by women for women, published by *Forum Nashim Datiot,* a network of Orthodox Israeli women. Since August 1998 it has appeared on the Shabbat preceding the blessing of the new Hebrew month with 50,000 copies sent to 3,200 Modern Orthodox synagogues. Individual subscribers in Israel pay 60NIS to receive it. (You can sponsor a page for a contribution.) Contact editor: *Hana Kehat, Neve Daniel, 90909 Gush Etzion, Israel; phone/fax (972-2)9934492.*

The Shalem Graduate Fellowship Program supports the work of students doing independent research on Jewish life in Jerusalem. Fellows research theoretical and practical topics in political philosophy, economics, education, government reform, Zionist theory and history, Israeli foreign policy, Jewish social thought and religion, Israeli culture and other topics relevant to the public life of the Jewish nation. Grants are $15,000 and cover the period from Sept. 1, 1999, to Aug. 31, 2000. Applications due Feb. 1, 1999. *The Shalem Center, 12A Hatzfira St., Jerusalem, Israel; (972-2)566-2202; or The Shalem Center, 1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW, #801, Washington DC 20036; (202)887-1270; fellowship@shalem.org.il; www.shalem.org.il*

THEATER

Jewish Female Playwrights! This may be your opportunity to have your work appear as part of a program of readings of the Partnership for Jewish Life: A Community of New Yorkers in Their 20s and 30s. Also an ongoing playwriting workshop is creating a Purim One-Act Play Festival involving directors, actors and playwrights to be performed in March 1999. Contact *Jennifer Rudin; PJL Actors & Playwrights Network, 6 E. 39th St., 10th Fl., New York, NY 10016; (212)792-6262; fax (212)792-6260.* (Prose writers available for readings should contact Pearl Gluck.)

Sweet Dreams (*Zise Khaloymes)* is a Yiddish musical by Eleanor Reissa about "a second generation American career girl in the 1990s, and her loving mother who just won't go away." Mina Bern stars with a multi-racial, youthful cast, in Yiddish with simultaneous translation. This Folksbeine Yiddish Theater production runs December 5–January 31. *Theater Four, 424 W. 55th St., New York, NY; box office (212)213-2120; telecharge (212)947-8844.*

MESSAGE IN THE MEDIA

The Yiddishe Mama and the Modern World is an exhibit featuring 20 posters of women in Eastern Europe

1918-1939, curated by Krysia Fisher. To find out how you can bring the exhibit—which recently was mounted at Brandeis University—to your venue, contact head archivist *Marek Web, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 15 W. 16th St., New York, NY 10011; (212)246-6080; fax (212)292-1892.*

The Distorted Image: Stereotype and Caricature in America, 1850-1922, is a 28-minute video and discussion guide about how caricatures in large circulation magazines reveal the extent and nature of stereotyping affecting all minority groups in the US. This is one of many anti-prejudice materials available from the *ADL Anti-Bias Diversity Catalog, ADL Material Library, Dept. SP98, 22-D Hollywood Ave., Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423; (800)343-5540; fax (201)652-1973; www.adl.org*

RIGHTS MONITORS

The International Jewish Women's Human Rights Watch researches and publicizes the infringement of Jewish women's rights, particularly women who have been denied the right to remarry and to found a family. Directed by international women's rights lawyer Sharon Shenhav. *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 13 Tel Hai St., 92107 Jerusalem, Israel; (972-2)561-9281; fax (972-2)561-9112; sshenhav@internet-zahav.net*

Tambourines designed by Betsy Platkin Teutsch are being sold to pay for legal expenses in the struggle for women's right to pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The colorful tambourine's head says in Hebrew "This is the chair of Miriam"—evoking the chairs that have been thrown at them. It invokes the traditional empty chair representing the longed for presence of someone important (like Elijah the prophet at a *brit milah).* Here, Miriam is invited to join the

prayer group at the Wall. $40 plus $3.50 shipping payable to International Committee for Women of the Wall, from *Eva Schweber, 2620 SE 51st Ave., Portland, OR 97206.*

Tzedec, a new project of the Shefa Fund, gets Jewish institutions to invest in low-income, community-based credit unions and loan funds around the US. The community development financial institution in turn provides credit to the underserved—primarily women, low-income and minority borrowers—for housing, child care and jobs to revitalize neighborhoods and people's lives. Find out how you, your federation, synagogue or Jewish foundation can invest in your community. Contact *The Shefa Fund 805 East Willow Grove Ave., #2D, Wyndmoor, PA 19038; (215)247-9704; shefafnd@libertynet.org*

The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous was established to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to compassionate Christian rescuers who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. It sends monthly financial support to almost 1,400 aged and needy rescuers in 26 countries to pay for food, housing and medical expenses. Send a contribution to *The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, 165 E. 56 St., New York, NY 10022-2746; (212)421-1221; (888)421-1221; fax (212)421-1811; jfrnyc@worldnet.att.net*

Why not a woman? Help change the political climate so that qualified women can launch viable campaigns for public office, including the US presidency, within the next decade. Become a member of this non-profit, non-partisan public awareness project with a check to The White House Project/ WNAW. "Together we will make history," says Barbara Dobkin. *The White House Project, 110 Wall St., 2nd fl., New York, NY 10005; (212)785-6001; fax (212)785-6007; www.the-whitehouseproject.org*

–compiled by Naomi Danis

One Hundred Years of Gratitude

BY LESLÉA NEWMAN

When I told my siblings that I was a lesbian, they had identical responses, though they live one thousand miles apart: "You're not going to tell Mom and Dad, are you?" Of course I was going to, and when I did, my parents had a similar, albeit more vehement response: "Don't you dare tell your grandmother."

But I did dare, despite my family's puzzlement over why she "had to know." After all, my grandmother was 99 years old, and had "more important things to worry about," according to my mother. And even I had to admit that my grandmother's plate was full. The year she turned 99, my grandmother's eyesight failed, her hearing declined, and worst of all, she was forced to give up the tiny Brooklyn apartment she had lived in for over 40 years and move to a nursing home.

I was well aware that my grandmother had plenty of *tsouris*; I spoke to her on the telephone every day. When my grandmother had something to *kvetch* about, it was my ear she sought and vice versa. We were extremely close. I am her only daughter's only daughter and I am named for her husband, the grandfather I never knew who died just a few months before I was born. Yet how close were we really, when I kept such a profound truth about my life a secret from her?

"*Feh*," my grandmother said, crossing her arms. "Lezel, darling, you're ruining your life."

The truth is, I came out to my grandmother because I loved her more than anyone else in the world and I couldn't stand to see her suffer. And every time we talked on the phone, she spoke of the same pain: the pain of knowing she was not long for this world and once she was gone, I'd be left all alone. My grandmother was an expert on loneliness; she had been a widow for 33 years. "I talk to the walls, just to have someone to talk to," she'd tell me, "and I don't want that should happen to you." Other times she'd just look at me utterly baffled, for I was her favorite granddaughter, in her eyes the smartest, prettiest, most talented girl in the world. So why didn't I have "a fella"? This made absolutely no sense to my grandmother, and as her hundredth birthday drew near, she grew more and more agitated about it.

"I only want to dance at your wedding, *mameleh*," she'd say. "Then I can die happy."

"Then I'm never getting married," I'd answer. "That way you'll live forever."

"Stop talking nonsense." My grandmother wagged a red painted nail. "It's no good to be alone. A stone is alone. Not a person."

Though I was far from alone, I couldn't face telling my grandmother that I lived with Mary, the woman I was in love with, the "friend" whom she had met many times. Instead I pointed out that even though she had gotten married, she still wound up living a third of her life all by herself, so what did it matter? My grandmother's response to this statement was to roll her eyes and shake her head. I was talking nonsense again.

On a crisp autumn day, just a week before Rosh Hashanah, I drove down to Brooklyn to visit my grandmother with exciting news. Mary had just given me a diamond ring and we were planning to have a ceremony to celebrate our lifetime commitment to one another. Could I tell my grandmother? How could I?

continued on page 45